

THE ISLAND TRADERS

A STORY OF THE SOUTH SEAS
BY ALEXANDER MACDONALD.



EKE
175

March 5 - 1933.

Happy Birthday
to Alex.

From

Jimmie,

Mother & Father.

The Island Traders

The Island Traders

A Tale of the South Seas

BY

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Contents

CHAP.		Page
I.	THE MYSTERY OF THE <i>MOTA</i> - - - -	9
II.	THE SECRET AGENTS - - - -	35
III.	THE RUN TO NEW CALEDONIA - - - -	60
IV.	THE <i>MOTA</i> SHOWS HER HEELS - - - -	88
V.	VATII'S MISTAKE - - - -	114
VI.	THE <i>MOTA</i> SAILS FROM FIJI - - - -	136
VII.	THE <i>MOTA</i> REACHES HER DESTINATION - - - -	171
VIII.	THE ONLY HOPE - - - -	200
IX.	RAYMOND PLAYS THE GAME - - - -	229
X.	RULE, BRITANNIA! - - - -	261

Illustrations

	Facing Page
"WELL, WHAT DO YOU THINK OF HER?" <i>Frontispiece</i>	
HE SAW A BLURRED VISION OF A FIGURE SPRINGING AT HIM - - - - -	40
RAISULI HAD SUDDENLY CAUGHT HIM BY THE THROAT	120
"WHAT DO YOU MEAN, SIR?" CRIED THE GERMAN -	168
THEY WERE DIRECTLY ABOVE THE OFFICERS' CAMP FIRE - - - - -	224
HE HAD THROWN HIMSELF UPON THE UNSUSPECTING MAN - - - - -	240



CHAPTER I

The Mystery of the "Mota"

RAYMOND FAIRFAX was in a quandary, and as he walked along George Street, Sydney, it seemed to him, for the moment, that he was one of those unfortunate beings for whom the world had no use. That morning he had received a letter from his uncle, his only relative, at whose expense he had been educated in the great sea-washed city of the south, informing him that henceforth he must make his own way in the world, and it was the question of how he could best set about doing this that worried Raymond. His uncle was a wealthy sugar planter over in Fiji, and Raymond had taken it for granted that one day he would relieve him of all business troubles and manage the plantation himself. But the letter dispelled that idea, and now he must fall back upon his own resources. The thought was not pleasing, for what could he, a friendless youth, do in a land the cities of which were already overcrowded with men of undoubted talents? Raymond had not neglected his studies,

although he had, perhaps, devoted more time to sport than he might have done had he thought his future was to depend upon himself.

"Ah, well," he muttered, turning in to Circular Quay, "I suppose I'll have to make a fight, the same as most other people have to do. Perhaps that is what Uncle Jack intended. In any case, it was more than good of him to send me a draft for a hundred pounds in his letter." He stood on the quay, and, leaning over the projecting rail, gazed around at the great ocean liners. Far on the extreme right the P. & O. mail steamer *Mooltan* was getting ready to depart for distant England, a land which Raymond often wondered if he would ever see. Nearer was the huge Orient liner *Omrah*, and between the two was berthed the long, low, white-painted French mail packet *Polynesian*. On the left lay the high-decked *Bremen* of the North German Lloyd, a Chinese liner, and one of the Eastern and Australian mail steamers, while, threading its way up the main harbour amidst the multitudinous cross traffic beyond Circular Quay, an incoming White Star steamer of huge dimensions completed the background of a picture of shipping such as could be seen in no other port of the world. In the middle distance the fast Manly and Parramatta river steamers flitted in and out among

Mystery of the "Mota" 11

some outward-bound coasting craft, and the many decked cross ferries darted to and from Milson's Point with most wonderful celerity.

Raymond watched the ever-changing panorama for a moment or two, then turned to walk round to where the *Mooltan* was ready to cast off. "I believe Britain is the place for me," he said to himself. "Chances might come one's way there which cannot possibly offer themselves in Australia. I might get on the staff of some leading newspaper in London, where the only asset I possess might be of value. Here it is no good to me, nor can I imagine anything happening which would alter the circumstances."

Like most youths of his age, Raymond thought that any other country offered more inducement than his own, and he would have been very much surprised had anyone told him that there were many in far-off, sunless Britain who would gladly have changed places with him. His one asset, as he termed it, was a thorough knowledge of the languages of Melanesia. Without knowing why, he had made their various dialects his special study, and only the day before had passed his examination in them with honours—the first to do so since the chair for South Sea languages had been instituted.

The Island Traders

He walked round the head of the U-shaped quay and then stopped abruptly. A vessel he had not noticed before was moored alongside Burns, Philp, & Company's wharf. Its bows jutted out over the low quay-front, and the name *Mota*, painted thereon, had caught his eye at once.

"This must be that South Sea trader that came in yesterday," he muttered. "I wonder if there really is anything in omens. Yesterday I passed my exams in the Mota dialect, the one subject in which I am well versed. To-day I am thrown on my own resources, and here is the steamer *Mota* confronting me. No, it can mean nothing. What could my knowledge of Mota avail me even though I were to go over among the islands where it is spoken? I'll go along to the P. & O. office and book a passage to London on the *Mooltan*; she can't be crowded at this season, and it is still an hour from sailing time."

"Well, what do you think of her?"

Raymond swung round sharply. A man was standing by his side whose clothes proclaimed him to be an officer of some ship.

"I believe she is one of the best boats," Raymond answered, slightly surprised at the familiarity of the stranger. "She is the latest P. & O. to come out here."

"P. & O.? What are you talking about?"

"The *Mooltan*. I am going home on her if I can get a ticket. Didn't you ask me what I thought of her?"

"No; I asked you what you thought of the *Mota*? You have been taking in all her good points, and, as I happen to be her skipper, I thought you wouldn't mind giving me your opinion."

"She looks a vessel that could travel a bit if pushed," Raymond ventured.

"Yes," the other admitted, hesitatingly; "but she has never been pushed. Good-morning!"

"A moment, please," cried Raymond, as the officer turned away. "I have a slight interest in the *Mota*. Would you mind telling me where she trades?"

"Among the islands," the man replied curtly, as he walked into the enclosed part of the wharf alongside which the *Mota* was lying.

Raymond thought the *Mota's* captain was rather strange in his manners, but as that did not concern him, he shrugged his shoulders and walked away towards Pitt Street. He had not gone far when something compelled him to look back at the *Mota*. A tall man in a rainproof overcoat was leaning on the quay rail exactly where he had stood. "I

wonder if the captain will ask him what he thinks of the *Mota*!" Raymond laughed. "He seems to be on the look-out for admirers of his ship." He was on the point of turning away again when, sure enough, he saw the gold-laced officer come out of the wharf shed and approach the man leaning on the rail. A conversation apparently ensued, but it was as brief as the former one, and this time it was the man who walked away.

"He ought to put his ship in a glass case," the youth said to himself. "I suppose he'll be lying in wait for anyone who looks at it."

And it seemed as if Raymond had guessed correctly. At that moment a man in a Panama hat walked leisurely round from the Orient sheds and paused almost under the bows of the *Mota*. Almost instantly the captain strolled alongside, and the man in the Panama hat continued his journey hurriedly.

Raymond thought things were becoming interesting, and waited to see who would be the next to be asked for his views concerning the *Mota*. It was a policeman, and this time the conversation seemed to be very animated, the guardian of the law finally nodding his head as if in full agreement with the opinion of the other, and walking away in a greater hurry than is usually associated with

gentlemen of his profession. While Raymond watched he saw the vigilant officer interview more than half a dozen chance passers who stopped to look at the *Mota*; then, forgetting, or not caring, that the *Mooltan's* time of departure was now only a matter of minutes, he crossed the car lines again to see if he would be questioned a second time.

But he changed his mind before he reached the quay-side. He saw the man in the rainproof coat and the man wearing the Panama in a dinghy, pulling round the *Mota's* stern. There was nothing suspicious in the action had any other two men been the occupants of the dinghy, but knowing that each of these men had shown an interest in the *Mota*, separately, Raymond now began to think that there might be some reason for the captain's strange behaviour, and that the *Mota* might be other than what she seemed. As he approached the vessel once more he overheard part of a conversation between the officer and a smart-looking young man of about twenty-five years of age. "I haven't located them yet," the captain was saying, "but I must have had them through my hands all the same, for I am sure I have held up about fifty people this morning."

"Has anyone come back a second time?" asked

the other. "That would give the show away if you could spot them."

"Oh, I think I'll spot anyone who comes for a second look at the *Mota*," the captain said; "and by my sextant! here's one now."

"You needn't be afraid of me, Captain," Raymond said, advancing. "I have been watching your little pantomime since we met before. It gave me some amusement for a time, but I have come back now to tell you, if it means anything to you, that a man in a light-coloured rainproof coat, and another wearing a Panama hat, both very tall men, have just disappeared round the *Mota's* stern in a dinghy."

The two men laughed.

"Well, Sydney Harbour is free," the captain said. "Anyone can navigate its waters if he knows how to look after himself."

"That's a fact," the younger man agreed, departing. "I'll see you later, sir."

"And remember the photographs," cried the captain; then turning to Raymond he said: "I suppose you are one of those clever detective fellows who stick their nose in everywhere. Well, you can do more than that. You can come on board the *Mota* and satisfy yourself that she is not a pirate craft, but an honest South Sea trader."

"I am sorry if I have given you the impression that I am anything else than a more or less useless fellow of no account," Raymond returned courteously. "I stopped here by chance this morning, and I really know nothing, nor desire to know anything, about the *Mota*. The name struck me when I saw it, because, only yesterday, I passed my exams. in that and other dialects of the Melanesian language."

"You did?" cried the captain excitedly. "Then you are the man I want. Your name is Fairfax?"

"That is my name. What do you want with me?"

Before the captain could reply an uproar arose on the deck of the *Mota*, and on the wharf side to which she was moored. It appeared that one of her mooring-ropes had become so slack that the middle part of it was under the water. Someone on deck, noticing this, had started the winch and wound the rope up, thus upsetting a dinghy with two occupants which somehow was passing over the sunken rope at that moment, between the side of the ship and the piles which supported the slightly projecting pier. In an instant men from the *Mota* sprang to the rescue of the two men, and soon they were brought safely on deck. A crowd had now gathered on the wharf, but on being

assured by the officials there that the men were all right, it gradually dispersed, hardly anyone taking more than a passing glance at the very commonplace-looking island trader *Mota*.

"Come on," the captain said to Raymond, a grin of delight spreading over his face. "That fellow Henderson is pretty 'cute, isn't he?"

"Who is Henderson?"

"My chief officer; that fellow who was talking to me when you came up. Oh, I forgot you don't know anything yet. You looked down on your luck when I saw you first. Am I right in thinking you are open to receive a proposition that may mean danger?"

"Dear me, Captain, what are you talking about? I am ready to take part in any enterprise, if that is what you mean, but the days of real adventure are gone for ever."

"Are they? You speak as if you had grown old looking for little chunks of history that were never published in the *Herald* or *Telegraph*, and hadn't found any. But I want a talk with you, anyway. You see, we are trading between the islands of Polynesia and Melanesia, and I badly want a purser who can talk the lingo. I saw in the papers this morning that a fellow called Fairfax could do that, and, well—will you take the job?"

Mystery of the "Mota" 19

Raymond thought for a moment. They were still standing on Circular Quay, and on the *Mota* everything was quiet but for the talk of the stevedores as they unloaded the ship of its cargo of bananas, copra, and other products of the islands.

"Captain," said Raymond at length, "I may say at once that I don't mind signing on as purser; but as, apparently, there has been so much mystery made out of this harmless-looking ship, I feel I must also add that while I don't care what personal risk I run, I draw the line at being party to robbing the natives, or any other scheme that is not worthy of a Briton, and an Australian at that."

"My lad, no man on board a ship commanded by me will ever be asked to do anything that a British gentleman who has left all his grandmotherly notions behind could not conscientiously perform. Regarding what one may be called upon to do on the *Mota*, which, I may say in confidence, is engaged in special work, and is alongside Circular Quay just now for a purpose, all imperially minded Britons could not help being interested in her mission if they knew of it, and least of all on earth could a true-born Australian raise any objection. I cannot tell you anything more until you sign on, and even then I cannot do more than guess at things myself, for we are to sail with

sealed orders. Think over the matter, lad, and let me know if you are to be the *Mota's* nominal purser this afternoon."

"I will sign on now, sir. I have reached the stage in which I must earn my own living, and as Mota and its kindred languages are about all I know to start with, I am very glad indeed to be enabled to put them to account as purser on an island trader. When do we sail?"

"Come on board, and we'll make all arrangements then, my lad. I may want you to take on your duties right away, and I may not have much time to explain matters before leaving, if I don't set about doing so at once."

Raymond followed the captain round into the wharf sheds and up the gangway on to the little steamer's deck. Henderson received them there with stiff formality. He had now assumed his officer's dress, and looked a splendid specimen of Britannia's oversea sons.

"You got your men very cleverly, Mr. Henderson," the captain said, after introducing Raymond and telling the officer that he was to be the future purser of the *Mota*. "Were they the genuine articles, or only more of the inquisitive tribe?"

"They each swore fluently in several European languages, sir," Henderson answered, significantly.

"Ah, you didn't handle them as if you suspected anything?"

"Oh no! I expressed my regret that the accident should have happened, and offered them dry clothes. They were very sullen men, however, and their manner was not, to say the most, polished. They flatly told me it was no accident, and would not accept my offer of dry garments. They went away in a cab, threatening all sorts of things. Smith got their photos while they were lying on the deck. He is developing them now, and perhaps some one will be able to recognize them."

"Likely enough; but you might play the game of simple sailor outside while I have a talk with our young friend. I expect we'll get orders to move to mid-stream soon now."

The officer went on shore to watch for anyone who appeared to be taking an interest in the little steamer, and the captain and Raymond went down into the saloon.

"Have you read the newspapers much of late, young man?" the captain enquired, motioning Raymond to a seat.

"Not much, sir. I can't work up any enthusiasm over tariff reform in Australia, and I am not interested in the cables dealing with European matters."

"Then allow me to tell you, sir, that no young man can afford to neglect reading the newspapers nowadays. It is the press that really controls the governments of the world, and the man who studies his newspaper knows what action these governments will take long before their slow, lumbering machinery gets into action."

"I thought, sir, the press merely represented the voice of the people!"

"Well, and what power is greater than the people?"

"I don't know, sir. I am not strong on these subjects, but I should fancy that if those cruisers lying over in Farm Cove turned their guns on Sydney city, all that the people could do would not amount to much."

"Boy, you are sure you know nothing of the *Mota's* mission?" The captain had become doubtful.

"No; surely it has nothing to do with the British Australian Squadron training their guns on Sydney?" Raymond was alarmed now, but a moment's reflection caused him to laugh heartily at the idea.

"It may have to do with preventing some of those fighting craft from turning their guns on some other floating fire-slingers."

"Dear me, Captain, you are getting quite melodramatic. I almost believe now that the *Mota* and her mysterious mission are just a new dodge of advertising Bland Holt's coming production of the 'Buccaneers'."

"Do you? Do you know, for a kid who has never had anything but solid ground under him, you have a fairly powerful amount of cheek."

"I beg pardon, Captain, I didn't mean anything. The idea struck me, and I couldn't help blurting it out. Tell me what my work is to be, and you'll not find me wanting in my sense of duty when the time comes for action."

"All right! sign your name to that affair there. Of course you understand that although your name is going down as purser, you may be called upon for other duties?"

"I don't care if I am called upon to help the stokers, sir, or to train a quick-firer upon a German cruiser."

"Jumping beans, boy, you know too much already! Who told you?"

"I was only guessing, sir," Raymond laughed. "I assure you, you may be going out guano prospecting, or to look for the South Pole, for all I know—or care. But I am one of the conspirators now, and await your orders."

The Island Traders

"Then, Mr. Fairfax, you will present yourself at the address given on this card, which is the office of the company for whom we nominally act. You will then order everything you require in the way of an outfit for yourself, and after that you may consider yourself free for the rest of the day to visit your friends and attend to private affairs. Report yourself to me on board this steamer to-morrow morning at nine o'clock, ready to assume your duties, bearing in mind that you may not be allowed to set foot on the shores of Australia after joining the steamer until we return from a trip to the Fijis, or somewhere else."

"Thank you, sir! I shall be quite ready to leave Sydney long before nine to-morrow."

"And it might be a good thing if you got hold of yesterday's *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Daily Telegraph*. These are two of the most sensible papers in the world, and if you read them both thoroughly, and are as smart as I take you to be, you'll not require much enlightenment from anyone as to the kind of game in which you are going to take a hand."

"Am I at liberty to come back to the ship before nine to-morrow morning, sir, if I wish?"

"Well, yes; I don't think there can be any harm in your being on board earlier. The *Mota*

may be taken round to Darling Harbour, or somewhere else, of course, so you will have to enquire at the office where she is, and get on board any way you can, should she not be here. Oh, by the way, you might ask them at the office to give you gold for these notes. I need some smaller money for paying odd accounts." The captain handed a bundle of bank notes to Raymond, who took them very gingerly.

"I'll come back immediately with the money, sir," he said; but the captain waved his hand.

"Not at all," he said; "I won't need the money until to-morrow. And look here, boy, this is not a test as to your honesty, as it is possible you may think; and if you turn up to-morrow and tell me you have lost the money, or that it has been stolen, I'll believe you."

Raymond placed the notes on the table. "Sir," he began, "the thought that you were testing my honesty never entered my head. I don't understand what you mean by saying that you'll believe me if I tell you I have either lost the money or allowed it to be stolen, and I think that seeing there is so much mystery about what purports to be an ordinary trading voyage to the islands, you had better get another purser."

"Go slow there, my young box of squibs; you

are away on the wrong tack already. Haven't you seen that the *Mota* is an object of interest to some people, and that I have been playing the fool all day trying to discover who they are? Isn't it therefore clear enough that you may be followed when you leave the ship?"

"Then why give me this money?"

"Because I don't know what the other people have found out about us, or what they suspect, and you are going to be the means of investigation. If you are followed and held up, and the gold taken from you—remember I want you to change the notes at once—I will know that our friends are only interested in our movements because of our supposed command of wealth; but if you are interviewed by people who do not care what money you may have about your person, then we will know that the real scheme has been given away. Now, are you afraid?"

Raymond gathered up the notes again. "No," he said grimly; "the business is growing more to my liking. This money you can afford to risk losing for the sake of the information?"

"I can't, my boy, but the people whom I represent can. I am the poor beggar who will get all the blame should our scheme turn out a failure, and who, if we can pull it off successfully, will

Mystery of the "Mota" 27

receive a cash consideration, and likely be bundled out of the country as a man possessing dangerous knowledge."

There was something in the captain's voice—a plaintive note, perhaps—that at once enlisted Raymond's sympathy.

"Captain," he said, offering his hand, "I am only a youngster of no account as yet, but I'll stick by you to the finish, whatever the venture is, and may the people who employ you go hang!"

"No, no, my lad," the captain cried. "The people for whom we are working are all right, as you will know in time. Things couldn't very well be otherwise, and they have guaranteed to pay my mother my yearly salary for life if I—fail."

"What do you mean, Captain?"

"Nothing much; only I have got to play a lone hand and stand all the racket if I don't succeed. That means a short piece of rope between my neck and a yard-arm."

"But why should you take the job on, Captain? Is it worth the risk?"

"Yes; my mother and young sister will be well looked after in either case, and my old carcass isn't worth much. Besides, I have already scraped the top of nearly every submerged rock or coral reef in the Southern Pacific, and I couldn't get a billet

now in legitimate trading. Our people know that, and believe that in a man with no hope for the future, or at the least but a forlorn one, lies their only chance of success; so now, boy, you know my story. I have a free hand and any help I want, but I alone am responsible."

"Then, Captain, I will work as if I shared that responsibility. I am beginning to think I understand matters a little bit; but I will read yesterday's papers thoroughly after changing these notes, and then act as in my poor judgment seems best, solely for you."

The captain grasped Raymond's hand again. "I believe you, my lad," he said. "In Henderson, Melville, the chief engineer, and you I have every confidence, and I know that you'll not see me beat and stand by inactive. But get away now; I must relieve Henderson outside. Go on shore before me so as to avoid suspicion, and don't look at Henderson in passing. Ah! one moment; here is Smith, my junior officer, with some photographs it may be well for you to see." A young man entered the saloon as the captain spoke, and in answer to the latter's signal, approached and handed over a photographic print.

"It isn't fixed yet," he said, looking at Raymond as if wondering how much he was supposed

Mystery of the "Mota" 29

to know; "but I have some copies in the fixing-bath now."

"There you are then, Mr. Fairfax," the captain said. "These are your friends of the dinghy incident. Get their faces impressed upon your memory for future reference. They may have nothing to do with our business, but at present I suspect they know more than they ought to know."

The captain then introduced the youthful officer and Raymond to each other, and next minute the new purser went on shore. He crossed quickly to an electric car that was just starting from Circular Quay for the railway station, and allowed himself to be carried up Pitt Street a block past the well-known office, the address of which was printed upon the card in his possession. While walking back he kept a sharp though apparently careless lookout to see if anyone was paying any attention to his movements; but the street was crowded with pedestrians at the time, and he singled out no person whom by any stretch of the imagination he could fancy was interested in himself. Two minutes later he entered the office, and a clerk at once came forward to the counter. Raymond produced his card and said: "I have called to ask if you would change these notes for me".

The clerk looked at the card. "A moment, please," he said; "I'll bring Mr. Peters."

Mr. Peters, a kindly-faced elderly man, came forward. Evidently he was either a partner in the firm or the manager. He looked at Raymond curiously for a moment or two, then said: "So you are one of the *Mota's* men? Do you know when she sails?"

"No," answered Raymond shortly; "I was sent to get these notes changed into gold here."

"That's all right; I've just sent a clerk over to the bank. I suppose you know all about the affair?"

"No, I don't," snapped Raymond; "I know nothing. But I was told to order all my personal requirements here, and I want a complete rig-out."

"That's all right too—your own tailor is attending to that now."

"My own tailor! What has he got to do with the affair? And who told him?"

"We did. We expected Captain Murchison would enlist you. You see we know you."

"So it seems. Who am I, pray?"

"Raymond Fairfax, chiefly famous because of his knowledge of Melanesian languages."

"Yes, you've got my name all right, but I

didn't know I was famous. I don't suppose I need ask what firm runs this office?"

"No; we can be as close as you, Mr. Fairfax. We don't believe in giving gratis information. Nevertheless, I will risk informing you that this office is only a temporary branch extension of a firm whose ramifications extend all over the civilized and uncivilized world, which could buy out many a kingdom, which controls a fleet equal in tonnage nearly to the P. & O. Company's, and which may yet have to try its strength with a European power."

"Why, that must be——" Raymond closed his mouth with a snap. The man who had worn the light-coloured rainproof coat, and whose photo was impressed in his mind in connection with the dinghy catastrophe, had entered the office and was standing at the counter.

"Exactly," smiled Mr. Peters, catching the boy's warning glance; "Messrs. Smith, Green, and Macpherson will always find us, and here is your little parcel. I should very much like to see you again."

"I may call in later in the afternoon," Raymond responded, as a clerk came forward to attend to the latest visitor; "but I should like to count this money." He emptied the little bag of sovereigns

before him and carelessly transferred them to his various pockets. This action surprised Mr. Peters somewhat, as he had thought that Raymond would have understood, and appreciated the idea of hiding from everyone the fact that he was carrying so much gold.

"Are you not taking risks needlessly?" he said. "Someone may rob you."

"I don't think so," laughed Raymond; "I am quite able to take care of myself." He shot a meaning glance at Mr. Peters as he spoke, and turned to leave the place.

"Ven vill your first steamer be leaving for Suva?" the man at the counter was asking the clerk. He spoke with a decided foreign accent, but Raymond could not make out whether it was German or French.

"We know nothing of shipping at this office, sir," the clerk replied. "You have made a slight mistake."

"Dank you! Can you please tell me vere de shipping offices are?"

"In Bridge Street, just round the corner from here."

Raymond closed the door behind him and walked rapidly down the street. "I'll watch if my foreign friend is really anxious to find out about

the Suva boat or not," he said, half aloud, "or if it was to overhear anything that might be said to me that he came into the office."

Apparently it was, for looking back, Raymond saw the man come out of the office and jump on board a car going in the opposite direction from where Bridge Street lay. Raymond laughed, and was about to return to continue his conversation with the kindly-faced Mr. Peters, and to explain his reasons for displaying the money, when a man passing on the other side of the street attracted his attention. It was the man he had seen wearing the Panama hat, and who had been in the dinghy with the person he had just avoided.

"I wonder if he is watching me!" Raymond mused. "He is a fairly powerful-looking fellow, and I don't think I could tackle him myself. By Jupiter! I'll reverse the order of the game and follow him. I'll get to the bottom of this mystery somehow. The fellow pretends he doesn't see me, or doesn't take any interest in me. Hallo! He must be genuine after all." The man had boarded a passing car without even a glance at Raymond.

The amateur detective instantly jumped on to the trailer which accompanies all railway-station-bound cars in Sydney, and kept his eyes on the man in the front part through the window in the

doors. Right to the big station Raymond was led, then, following his man through a dense crowd of people who had congregated to see the Queensland mail leave; he entered a long corridor suburban train drawn up on the other side of the platform, walked through it, and then back to the electric-car terminus again. In twenty minutes he had arrived at Circular Quay once more, and the *Mota* loomed up before him. The man walked past her bows slowly, and then turned in behind the wharf sheds.

“This is getting tiresome,” Raymond said to himself as he followed. “I am afraid I’ll have to give up trying to make a mysterious adventure out of nothing, especially in such a modern city as Sydney——”

His words were cut short abruptly. A number of men had sprung upon him from behind some cases just discharged from the China boat. He tried to shout, but the grip on his throat rendered that impossible. Next moment he was bundled into a waiting cab. His brain reeled for a moment, then he fell back on the seat. He had been chloroformed.

CHAPTER II

The Secret Agents

WHEN Raymond regained his senses he found himself lying on the floor of an unfurnished room. It was dark, and he lay still for some time, endeavouring to account for his strange situation. This he could not do, his brain refusing to follow out the wild ideas which surged through it, and pirate ships, hard-hearted uncles, mysterious Germans, South Sea islands, desperate captains, and detectives became mixed up in hopeless confusion. He rose to his feet and walked to the one window of the apartment. In the distance the lights of Sydney city cast their flare into the heavens, and beneath him a row of gas lamps indicated the presence of a suburban street at the end of a little garden which seemingly surrounded the house. He did not know how far the ground lay beneath him, but he judged from the street lamps that he must be in the top story of some large mansion.

“If I only knew where I was,” he muttered, “I might——” He paused—the far-famed city post-

office clock was striking; if he could see its illuminated dial he would know. He opened the window cautiously and looked out; but no familiar landmark loomed within his vision, and he realized that he was a prisoner in a suburb of the city he knew so well, yet he might be almost anywhere else so far as knowledge of his environment was concerned. "Perhaps I'll be able to locate myself in daylight," he said to himself, gently closing the window. "I feel too tired and sleepy to worry just now. I half believe this is all a nightmare, and I'll awake in the morning and find myself on board the *Mota*. Why, what on earth is the *Mota*? I must be dreaming; but as I fancy I hear people talking in the next room, I'll listen at the keyhole and see if my dream mind can hear anything interesting."

He quietly approached the door leading to another room, laughing at himself for taking pains to move silently, and applied his ear to the keyhole. Then he became wide awake, and the events of the last twelve hours rushed back upon him in an instant. He knew now he was not dreaming, and all his senses became alert. A man was speaking, and Raymond recognized the voice as that of the man of the rainproof coat, and of the dinghy accident, whom he had heard enquiring for the Suva boat

"It was very simple," he was saying in German, a language which Raymond could follow fairly well. "I saw him come off the ship and take a car, and I signalled to Rosenthal to watch him, although not expecting that any good might come out of it. Rosenthal stood at the door of the office until I came up, then I went in and asked when the first boat left for Suva in Fiji. The clerk looked alarmed, but said theirs was not a shipping office, but the boy emptied out a packet of sovereigns on the counter, very obviously for my benefit, and I knew then what the game was. They must think we are common thieves, and he did that so that, if we were, I should follow him, and if we did not take his money then Captain Murchison, who is too suspicious to be innocent himself, would know we had other business on. Well, the boy saw Rosenthal, and followed him, like a story-book detective. I joined in the game at the station, and from there went ahead to Circular Quay to get some of our own men ready. You know the rest; the boy is in the next room."

"That's all very good, Schwartz," put in another voice, "but would it not be better now if we removed his money and carted him back to some deserted street where the police would find him. Then they would think that his money was all

we were after, and their suspicions would be removed."

"But then we would not know any more ourselves," said a third voice, which Raymond assumed belonged to the man named Rosenthal, whom he knew as the man of the Panama hat, and who had tricked him so neatly. "You must remember, Herr Branstein, that we have only a suspicion too, and we dare not act without being sure, for one mistake and we are disowned by the Fatherland, and will be left to suffer everything on our own."

"But we must do something," persisted Herr Branstein, "or we will be too late. We must risk boldly, or the New Guinean business may be repeated."

"Let us go over the position once more," suggested Schwartz; "but first let us make sure the boy is all right."

Raymond stepped back from the door, and, laying himself down on the floor, feigned to be still unconscious. He had barely composed himself when the door opened, and the three men came into the room, one of them carrying a lamp. Raymond would have liked to open his eyes so that he might note the features of the man he had not yet seen; but to do so would have been foolish under the

circumstances, so he directed all his will power to keeping them closed, an accomplishment rendered extremely difficult when one of the men flashed the lamp in them.

"Oh, he's all right for some time yet," laughed Schwartz. "He'll not play detective again for a long time. It almost makes me have a fit when I think of any of us fellows being followed."

"Thunder and lighting! If anyone had followed you, Schwartz, this last year, they would have gone round the globe a good many times."

"Not so," snarled Schwartz. "They would have died in China by knife, or by poison in Persia, or maybe by rope in Morocco."

"Yes, it wouldn't do if secret agents of the greatest power on earth could be shadowed with impunity," remarked Herr Branstein. "But this youngster will lie here for hours yet. Let us get our plans arranged. Are we to kick him out after taking his money, or what?"

"No, we can hardly do that," said Rosenthal; "we must manage some other way."

"And we must make him tell us all he knows too," added Schwartz; "and after that we daren't allow him to go back. Listen! I have a plan. Come into the other room and I will explain." He bent down as he spoke and lifted Raymond's eye-

lids, flashing the lamp into the eyeballs as he did so. "I thought I saw them move," he remarked, as he straightened himself again, "and I don't like him not to breathe a little more."

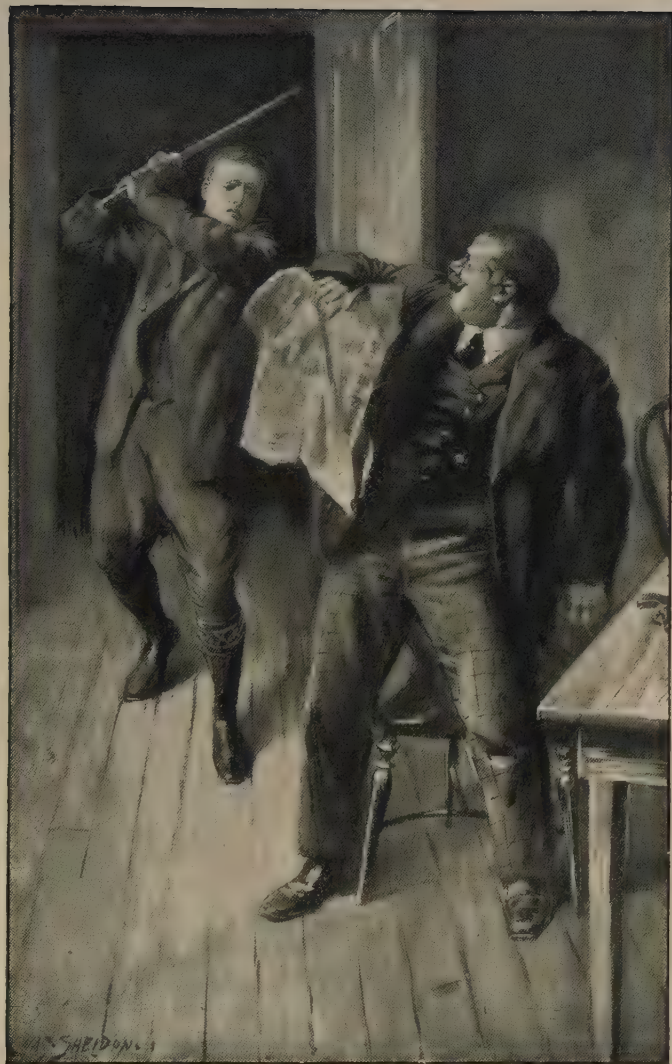
"Turn him on his side," suggested Herr Branstein; "the poor beggar is having a nightmare. See, that is better now; he is breathing regularly. I don't like causing more suffering than our duties compel us to inflict."

"You should not be a secret agent," laughed Rosenthal. "I would like to kick him for the ducking his people gave us to-day. It was no accident."

"Really, Rosenthal, I thought all gentlemen of our profession had long ago mastered that most elementary feeling of revenge. We cannot afford to have private feelings in anything, even although we get a blow for which we could easily give two in return. Leave the youngster alone in the meantime; he'll regret running against us afterwards."

"We'll see to that, Herr Branstein," Schwartz remarked significantly, as they went out of the room, leaving the door ajar so that they could hear any sounds made by their prisoner on his return to consciousness.

But they were mistaken on that point, for Ray-



B 934

HE SAW A BLURRED VISION OF A FIGURE SPRINGING AT HIM

Page 45

mond was beside the partly open door almost as soon as they had seated themselves. He did not intend missing any of the conversation, and besides, he felt that he was an interested party.

"Here is my plan then," began Schwartz. "I know the boy's handwriting. I took some trouble to find it out. Now I will copy it, and send a letter to Captain Murchison to-night, telling him that I, Raymond Fairfax, have backed out of the venture and have gone away somewhere up country. This will make the gallant captain angry; but he cannot help himself, and it will account for the boy not coming back to the ship. Then we will take the boy in hand and force him to tell us all he knows; we know how to make people speak. And after that we'll give him to some of our men to take away somewhere out of the road, and set about the next part of the business."

"That sounds all right," said Herr Branstein; "but what if, after all, there is nothing in the hint we got, and the *Mota* is just what she appears to be."

"We'll not have given our hand away even if we are on the wrong tack."

"And if the *Mota* is sunk with a shot from a twelve-inch gun somewhere out among the islands, who will know of it, and who will dare accuse our

people of doing it?" put in Rosenthal. "Those who may feel pretty sure of the matter will, for reasons of their own, keep their mouths shut."

"But apart from the hint we have received, is there any proof that a double game is being played just now?" asked Herr Branstein.

"Well, the whole story is this," said Schwartz: "A, B, and C, to give them convenient titles, are all anxious to possess a group of islands out in the Western Pacific. They can't all have them, nor is a joint ownership possible. But without any apparent reason A has suddenly announced that the islands are valueless to her and that she wants nothing to do with them, thus leaving negotiations pending between B and C. But both B and C distrust A,—B having many good reasons for doubting A's honesty—and as A has friends, or satellites, among the other letters of the alphabet, or, if you like it better, among the other Powers of the world, they suspect that A is playing a game she has played successfully several times before; that is, stepping out after having arranged with D to take the islands, while B and C are coming to an understanding regarding their rights. The trouble is, we cannot quarrel with D until she shows her hand for fear that it is to E that A has entrusted the matter, and any mistake we make may

mean apologies and compensation that, apart from the loss in prestige to B and C, also means our personal ruin as secret agents. We represent B. What C is doing we neither know nor care, as we have to fight her, diplomatically, in any case. We suspect, from what we have heard, that this ship, the *Mota*, is an agent by which D means to effect a grand coup, but we do not know for certain, hence all our work. We dare not show our hand, because that would put D—if she really is in the game—on her guard, and make an enemy of her if she were not. Now, what are we to do?" Schwartz paused and looked enquiringly at the others.

"Perhaps this boy can be made to give us the desired information," suggested Herr Branstein. "Once we know, we can easily take steps to crush D."

"That is the idea of his being here," said Rosenthal. "But we are forgetting; we have to spy upon C's agents to-night. It is time we were not here."

"But we haven't got the boy's story," said Herr Branstein, "and we can't all go and leave him."

"We will make him speak when we come back," said Schwartz; "and as only two of us need go

down to find out what our C friends are doing, I propose that Rosenthal stays here to watch until we return."

"Oh, I don't care," said Rosenthal with a yawn. "Don't be longer away than you can help, or I may start to make the prisoner speak myself."

"Remember you are supposed to be a gentleman, Rosenthal," reminded Herr Branstein, "and do not abuse the power you hold in your hands. The boy is just a pawn the same as we are."

"Oh, I'll not kill him; that is not quite in my line at present," Rosenthal laughed, as his two comrades went out. He lit a cigar, and, unfolding a newspaper, he studied it intently. "The New Scotia Convention," he read. "Where does Australia come in?"

He settled himself back in his chair and read on quietly, and pushing the door farther open, the watcher saw that it was a copy of the *Sydney Morning Herald* he was reading. But he also saw something else, and at once a plan of action presented itself to him. The man's back was towards him, for he had swung round from the table at which he was seated. A cocked revolver lay at his elbow, and Raymond thought if he could gain

possession of the weapon he might be able to reverse the position of captor and captive. Noiselessly he stole back to the window of his own room. There was an arrangement of shutters folded back in a recess by the window, and he had noticed that there were sockets on both sides of the window, in which presumably an iron bar could be placed to lock the shutters when in position. If he could get that iron bar he would have a weapon with which he could do some damage. As quietly as possible he drew the shutters out, and almost gave vent to a shout of joy when he saw the locking bar lying behind where they had been. He armed himself with the bar and stole back to the door. Rosenthal was still reading. For a moment the boy hesitated. He knew that if the door creaked when he pushed it farther open, Rosenthal would turn instantly and see him. Then he calculated that he might have time to reach the man before he could use the revolver, if he acted promptly, and this he decided to do. He raised the bar in his two hands, paused a moment for breath, then pushed the door open with his foot, and leaped upon the unsuspecting German. The man swung round at the first sound he heard, which was that caused by the door swinging back upon the inside wall. He saw a blurred vision of a figure springing at him. He

tried to draw back, then lights danced before his eyes, and he subsided on the floor stunned.

"I didn't like to hit him so hard," Raymond muttered, standing over the unconscious heap of humanity, "but I couldn't risk giving him any chance to use that revolver." He threw his blood-stained weapon from him with a shudder and bent over the man. Blood was trickling from an ugly wound in his head, and the parts around were swelling rapidly. Raymond searched through the room until he found a pair of scissors, with which he cut the matted hair, then, making a pad of his handkerchief, he soaked it in water and placed it upon the wound, afterwards tying it in position. "He will be conscious directly," said Raymond. "But I fancy he'll feel too sick to worry about the *Mota* for some time, and in any case it is high time I took my departure." He picked up the revolver and the newspaper and walked to the outer door. The handle turned all right, but the door did not open. "Locked!" ejaculated the boy. "It is good for me that the key is inside." But that fact apparently made no difference, for although he turned the key and handle in every possible way, the door remained shut, and it dawned upon him that there must be some secret lock which it was not likely he could find. Again he tugged at the door, and

the handle came off in his hands. "I am done this time," he muttered, almost crying with vexation, "and I shall assuredly be murdered by the others when they return." He pulled the revolver from his pocket. "Perhaps things are not so hopeless after all," he continued, examining its loaded chambers with careful eye. "I will hide until they open the door, and then hold them up if I can't rush past them. Hallo!"

The exclamation was caused by the sight of a coil of rope lying in a corner of the room, and once more hope ran high within him. Raymond was not slow to act. He carried the rope into the room wherein he had been a prisoner, and locked the door by means of the key which he took from the other side. Next minute he had made one end of the rope fast to the shutter fittings and thrown the free end through the open window. He could not tell whether it had reached the ground or not, but he lost no time in hesitation. Giving the rope a tug to see that it was securely fastened, he put his feet through the window, and next moment launched himself out upon the rope. Just as he did so, a wild medley of words broke out in the other room, and the door leading to the prison chamber was attacked by some heavy object.

"I'm glad Rosenthal has recovered," smiled

Raymond grimly. "I suppose these are swear words he's using. It's a good thing I don't understand German too well."

The sounds faded as he slid down the rope, and suddenly, with a shock, his feet touched bottom. He stood for a moment to see where he was, and while he crouched in to the wall the curses broke out again, and on looking up he saw, by the light of the lamp in his hand, the bandaged head of Rosenthal stretched out over the window.

"That was pretty close work," Raymond chuckled. "I'd better get out into the street before he comes down by the door." He ran round the corner of the house, and crossed a strip of flower garden which lay between the front and a wall which hid the house from the street. "I'll not risk the gate," he continued. "Perhaps it has a secret lock too." So, keeping in the shadow of some flowering shrubs, he ran over to the wall and sprang at its top.

At the same moment the half-mad German rushed to the gate and flung it open, and his frenzied shriek told Raymond he was discovered. Dropping from the wall into the street, he ran blindly, pursued by his late captor, who was shouting wildly in his own language. The street was deserted, however, and Raymond was a runner who had few

equals at his college. He turned down the first cross street he came to, then along the next, and suddenly the lights of a main thoroughfare burst into view at the foot of another cross street. A minute and a half later he was among a crowd of gaily dressed theatre-goers, and recognized the street as Oxford Street. An electric car came along, and he sprang on board and fell back in a seat exhausted. He felt he was safe now; but even at the moment of feeling secure he saw a man with blood-stained bandages round his head rush round a corner into the lamplight.

"Say, young fellow, you did a sprint for nothing," said the conductor, entering for Raymond's fare. "Didn't you see the stopping station just a few yards ahead?"

"Are we going to stop?" gasped Raymond, looking back at the gesticulating German.

"We are; this is the penny section to Circular Quay." As he spoke the car stopped. "Hallo, kid, what's the matter with you?" the conductor went on. "Are you clearing out from someone?" He turned and saw the figure about to clutch the rail, and promptly signalled "Go ahead" to the driver. The car leaped forward, but ere it had gathered momentum the German had obtained his grip.

"Stop!" he roared. "Ten pounds if you stop!" The conductor turned angrily. "Let go, you idiot!" he cried. "You'll get killed! This is not an ambulance wagon."

But the German was agile as a cat, and already he had contrived to obtain a foothold.

"Get out, kid," yelled the conductor. "Jump off at the other end." His hand was on the button to signal stop, when a fleet-footed figure dashed up behind and seized the hanger-on by his coat tails. "Come off," it said; "I want to speak to you."

The German fell back on to the roadway, and a crowd rushed to his side from all quarters. "Stop the car!" shouted several.

"No," yelled the conductor to the driver; "let her rip."

The driver did so, and in the midst of the excited crowd fast being left behind Raymond recognized, with a start, the tall, handsome figure of Henderson, the *Mota's* chief officer. A feeling of relief stole over him, and as the car swung round into Elizabeth Street he began to realize vaguely that he was now a person of some importance to the firm known by the secret agents as D, if they really existed.

He opened the paper he still carried. It was a day old, and therefore one of those which the captain

had asked him to read. The first item that met his gaze was in the "cable" column, and from the manner in which the paper was marked with finger prints all around, he knew that he was looking at a message which had special interest to him as one of the *Mota's* men. The cable read:—

"LONDON, *Wednesday, Midnight.*

"In answer to a question in the House of Commons, it was announced to-day that Great Britain had waived her rights in the New Scotias in favour of Germany, the latter power agreeing in return to recognize Britain's commercial supremacy in the Tongan group."

"There doesn't seem much in that," Raymond said half aloud, "and in any case it hardly concerns me unless—by Jupiter! it must be—Great Britain is A and Germany is B."

"I say, kid," the conductor interrupted, coming into the empty car at that moment, "I don't mean to say you don't know your own business best, but it is just possible that that fellow who tried to catch us in Oxford Street may have telephoned down to the terminus. Now, if he and you have any reason for not wishing to meet again, I should advise you to get off at the next stop. You'll find the Hotel Metropole down the cross street a few yards,

and you should go in there and have a good feed, for you look as if you needed one."

"Thanks!" Raymond responded, "I'll take your advice. I've just remembered I've had no food to-day."

"If you are down on your luck I can afford to miss a few shillings."

"But I am not," said Raymond, as the car stopped. "I have a pocket full of sovereigns, and I would like to know your name, so that I can thank you at a more convenient time." He jumped off the car as he spoke.

"Hordern is my handle, lad, but I have no connection with the great family of the same name."

"And mine is Fairfax," cried Raymond, as the car started down the hill to Circular Quay.

He could see the lights of the next car approaching, and as he did not know whether they belonged to a car which had come by Oxford Street or one which had joined the main route from some other point, he hastily walked down the cross street until the huge buildings of the Hotel Metropole rose in front of him. Thinking he would feel better after having had something to eat, he entered the hotel, intending to go to the restaurant on the ground floor; but recollecting that his landlady would now

be anxious about him, and that if he sailed on the *Mota* in the morning he would have little chance of calling round to explain matters to her, he decided upon writing her a note before dining. Proceeding to the lounge, he sat down in a corner and indited his letter and, after stamping it, he arose to drop it in the hotel pillar-box. But he sank back into his corner hurriedly. At the little round table nearest him were seated two men, lazily sipping brandy. They looked typical Frenchmen, but in themselves would not have drawn Raymond's attention had he not seen, seated at the table beyond them, dressed in immaculate evening dress, Schwartz and another whom he knew instinctively was Herr Branstein. They did not appear to be taking much interest in the Frenchmen, but Raymond remembered what he had heard them say upon whom they were to spy, and knew therefore that the brandy sippers were the secret agents of C.

"I suppose I'm D, then," Raymond half laughed, hiding his face behind a newspaper. "It is strange how all should meet here. I'll listen a bit, and then get down to the *Mota* with all the news."

"It is so," one of the Frenchmen was saying in his native tongue, which language, also, Raymond understood. "Britain has dropped out of the

running and we need only watch the Kaiser's men now."

"Then you do not fear that Australia will try to do something on her own account?" said the other.

"No; there are enough French gunboats in Noumea harbour to blow the Australian fleet out of the water. The most powerful chief on the islands, too, is also a friend of France, and that is a little fact that the Germans don't know."

"But can we depend upon Chief Tamii? Will he know what to do if trouble is forced upon him?"

"Oh yes! he got his education in Noumea, and is well trained to look upon the New Scotias as part of New Caledonia."

"Is it not strange how all these islands have derived their names from Scotland?"

"Oh, Scotsmen go everywhere! They would soon make the planet Scotch if they could only live on rice like a Chinaman. But we do not need to fear them just now."

"But if the Germans think they will lose the islands as a result of the conference, will they not try to seize them and force France to give up hope or declare war?"

"No; if the German lands anywhere, Tamii will at once proclaim the islands to be a French Pro-

tectorate, and then it is Germany that must declare war."

"Ha, ha! that is good; and Tamii will do the same if any of the other people try to take them. Let us drink to him. Waiter, some more brandy."

The conversation now became general, the men looking round the room as if fearful that they had been talking recklessly, and soon after Schwartz and Herr Branstein took their departure. They had heard more than they had hoped to hear, and as they passed into the hall they laughed loudly. They did not think much of the Frenchmen as secret agents.

Nor did Raymond. He wondered why they could be so reckless as to discuss their business in the smoke room of a popular hotel. "I suppose they are of opinion that there is really greater secrecy among a crowd of unknown, and therefore uninterested, people than in a locked room, which in itself would encourage suspicion," Raymond mused; "but they ought to have satisfied themselves that their neighbours were disinterested and didn't understand French——"

A burst of laughter from the Frenchmen interrupted his musing, and, looking over the top of his paper, he saw them gaze through the door at the retreating Germans.

"Henri, my friend, that was superb. It was magnificent," said one. "These foolish Germans have got something to think over to-night. They will now go very slow before landing a force on the islands, for fear of Tamii."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the other, "it was very good. They think themselves so clever, too, and that we are great fools. Bah! any boy could have spotted them as Germans at once. Tamii friendly to France! Ha, ha! he would like to eat all the Frenchmen, and Germans too, he could catch."

Both men enjoyed another good laugh and then, after calling for more brandy, left the place. Then Raymond stood up. "I suppose I ought to step to the middle of the room and make a sort of melodramatic speech," he said to himself, "for it seems as if I now know every side of the question but the side in which I am interested. Anyhow, I have the last laugh, and if my copybook spoke truthfully, that is the best laugh. But I'll not indulge in laughter for fear there may be someone among these smokers over there watching me. I'll get away as quietly as I possibly can, and I rather think I'll do without having anything to eat in the meantime."

He walked out to the hall and posted his letter, then stepped down into the street. The usual crowd

of visitors, loiterers, and others were standing around the doorway, but he did not care even if Rosenthal were among them. He intended to make the best time possible to the *Mota*, and he would use the revolver in his pocket against whoever tried to stop him.

But no one interfered with him, although he fancied some men followed him on the other side of the street until he turned in to Circular Quay, where the great concourse of people passing to and from the many harbour steamers rendered him safe from attack so long as he kept on the brilliantly illuminated quay.

He walked rapidly to the *Mota's* mooring-place, and received another set back—the *Mota* was not there. A man approached him, and he clutched his revolver. He did not intend to be trapped twice. But he withdrew his hand quickly; the man was Henderson.

“Hurry, boy,” he said; “get into that dinghy. I’ve been expecting you here this last half-hour. The *Mota* is in midstream with steam up.”

“And I know all the plans of B and C,” cried Raymond, forgetting that Henderson did not share his knowledge of the simile.

“Never mind B and C just now, young man. I have had a pretty hard day of it keeping an eye

on you, and I'll not feel sure of you until I see you off the land. Get into the dinghy and pull out a few strokes. I have got to find a man to take the place of the spy who had to clear out to-day. You don't happen to know of anyone who doesn't value his own carcass too highly, do you?"

"There is a man named Hordern on the Oxford Street trams who seemed to me as if he wouldn't mind risks, but I don't suppose you could get him on so short a notice."

"Can't I?" said the officer. "It so happens I know Hordern well; he was once a shipmate of mine. Why, there he is over there now!"

"Yes, that's the man," cried Raymond. "He must have made another journey since then."

Henderson ran across the road. "Hullo, Hordern," he cried, "where did you drop from?"

"From an electric tram. I've just got the sack for not seeing you haul that madman off my car in Oxford Street to-night. I suppose I'll have to try bushwhacking now."

"Are you ready for a venture—one with risks and great chances?"

"Can I punch penny tickets? Of course I am, now, if you wish. Hullo, kid, are you in it too? I hope you are feeling better now."

"Yes, I am in it, Mr. Hordern," said Raymond,

"and but for your help to-night I might not be in it."

"Come on, then," cried Henderson impatiently; "the ship is waiting."

"But I have no clothes!" laughed Hordern.

"I have plenty, and we're about the same size."

"All right! what am I to do?"

"Act as second officer, and anything else for the common good."

"Sorry, old man. Don't you remember my ticket was taken from me over the Newcastle bar business?"

"The ship you are to sail on does not come under any Board of Trade regulations. A shore agent is on board now, and you can send a letter back with him to any friends."

"I haven't any friends. Let's get on with the funeral."

Half an hour later the three were on board the *Mota*.

CHAPTER III

The Run to New Caledonia

As the post-office clock boomed out the hour of midnight, the *Mota's* screw began to revolve, and she was headed for the open sea. The agent, who turned out to be the elderly pleasant-faced gentleman Raymond had met in the office, had gone off for the shore in a dinghy, and now everything was in the hands of Captain Murchison. Henceforth he was to act as seemed best to himself, and if he failed to carry out the scheme entrusted to him, he alone must bear all blame and punishment. He stood on the little bridge himself as the *Mota* sailed at half speed past "Pinch Gut" Island and took up her proper course for the Heads, so as to allow the last returning Manly and Mosman's Bay steamers to make direct for the bows of the P. & O. steamer, berthed that afternoon, *en route* for Circular Quay.

An incoming coasting steamer rushed past them on the starboard, and a belated Queensland-bound packet, which ought to have left ten hours before,

The Run to New Caledonia 61

followed closely on the *Mota's* stern. When the illuminated Manly steamer passed, the captain rang down full speed, and half an hour later the famous Sydney Heads were cleared, and the little vessel was tossing heavily in a choppy sea. All night she forged eastward and northward, and when daylight came she was sailing through tranquil waters at a good twelve-knot speed.

At breakfast in the saloon the captain addressed his officers thus:—"Gentlemen, most of you know our mission, and that at best it is but a forlorn hope. We have powerful enemies and no friends, and only by a series of daring attempts and concentrated effort can we hope to succeed. You all know that the islands of the New Scotia group have been a bone of contention among Great Britain, Germany, and France for some time. They can't agree over the matter, nor yet can they risk a fight, for it is a sure thing that if any two fight, the third will annex the islands without much fear of consequences. Of course, if any power could plant their flag officially on the islands, without let or hindrance from the others, the matter would be ended, as the planting of the flag signifies to all the other powers that the power which could do so without interference had a preponderance of influence on the islands which entitled her annexing them. But it

is hardly possible for any war-boat to come along and perform that trick, for every gunboat in the Southern Seas is known and watched so well that, if a one-horse torpedo boat even left Sydney Harbour just now, the cables would be tingling with the news in all the European, and at least one Asiatic language, and she would find herself called upon to fight by perhaps a man in a dinghy with a gorgeous uniform and a big flag. That man, however, signifies a protest; and if our imaginary torpedo boat acted high-handedly after that, it would be equal to a declaration of war between Britain and the country the man with the flag represented; and then, of course, the power which stood by would promptly seize the islands while the others fought."

"But surely Britain has enough adventurers who could man a fair-sized merchantman and annex the group!" put in the chief engineer.

"No, that would be called filibustering. A great power cannot recognize the acts of private individuals unless it is necessary to the commercial interests of her citizens that she should, and the other powers would say that annexation was not necessary for that purpose in our case."

"Then how will the affair end?" asked Hordern, who was now smartly dressed in one of Henderson's

The Run to New Caledonia 63

uniforms. "The powers will simply stand and watch each other until a fourth comes along."

"Oh, meanwhile their secret agents are working among the inhabitants to get them to ask the protection of the country they represent. But a new aspect has been cast upon the affair by Britain drawing out without any apparent reason."

"Why, sir, Germany is giving up her rights to the Tongan group in return," Raymond said.

"Germany never had any right there, my lad. Australia and New Zealand built up a trade with the Tongans, and all the powers combined couldn't take it away, simply because there is no place to which they could divert it."

"Then why has Britain given up her claims?" asked Raymond.

"That's exactly what Germany and France would like to know," the captain answered. "You see, they don't believe much in Britain's simplicity, and they remember one or two things that happened before. I refer to Britain backing out of the Samoan group when Germany and she wanted them. That looked very soft on her part, until it was discovered that it was to let America in that she did so. 'It is not lost what a friend gets', I suppose, is an axiom among nations as among people."

"The New Guinean business before that might have shown them that Britain was as much alive as ever she was," said Henderson.

"Ah! but that point can be looked at in several ways," answered the captain. "Admiral Moresby annexed New Guinea for Great Britain, but it appeared that Germany and Holland had really some kind of claim, and she had officially to disown the action of the gallant sailor, or be the cause of war, for which at the time she was ill prepared. This was, and is, believed to be the reason to this day; but some people who should know say that there was more behind the thing than that, and that Britain said to plucky, sparsely populated Queensland, her youngest colony: 'You can't allow a foreign power to dominate your shores; you take New Guinea in your own name, and we'll stand by you. It is a different thing fighting a war to defend our colony's interests from waging an aggressive war for mere enlargement of territory.'"

"But who is the D or fourth power the Germans talked of in this case?" asked Raymond, greatly interested. "And where do we come in?"

"We are the D, my lad, if we fail; but if we succeed, the Commonwealth of Australia takes the honour, and Britain will back her up with the

The Run to New Caledonia 65

might of the British navy. The Commonwealth has given me, as being the most desperate man they know, the job of securing the New Scotia group. Unlimited wealth and everything else is placed at my disposal by a firm, and my orders are to trade in the South Seas. That firm, of course, is the acting agent for the government, but it also really possesses great interests in the islands, as it has run a regular line of traders to them for years past, and this trade it will lose should any foreign power annex the islands. Of course if we are caught in the act, that firm disowns us too, and I will state that all you fellows are in my employment without knowing what I am trying to do."

"You'll do nothing of the kind, Captain," roared Henderson. "I for one will take my cash or my gruel, whichever comes, alongside you, as is my duty, and I don't think there are many on this ship who won't."

"If there are, I'll chuck them overboard when I find them out," said the chief engineer.

"You'll find me hanging by your side if their supply of rope does not run short, Captain," laughed Hordern. "I'd rather peg out than go back to collect pennies and play polite to elderly females again."

"But we are not going to fail," said Raymond, "therefore why talk of it?"

"Right, my lad! we'll not get ourselves into the belief that we must fail, but rather that success will reward us. But I must get on deck, boys. I will tell you my plans and hear yours later."

The captain and his first and second officers went on deck, and allowed Smith, the third, to come down to breakfast. This gentleman was not much more than a boy, but he had already sailed over the greater portion of the South Seas. His only hobby was photography, and he had a most daring and reckless nature which often brought him into trouble. He burst into the saloon with a cheery greeting to Raymond and the chief engineer, who, as usual, was a Scot, although born in the great Land of the South.

"Say, old man," he cried to Raymond, as he sat down, "you'll have to slow down a bit and give other people a chance to stand in the limelight. I heard all about your experiences from Henderson last night, and I must say you did as well as I could have done myself. Between us I believe we'll pull old man Murchison through this affair."

"I'll leave you to form your plans, then," said Melville, the engineer, with a friendly laugh. "Sometimes a bit of youthful impetuosity is not a

The Run to New Caledonia 67

bad thing, but count me in when it comes to a push."

"All right, Melville!" laughed Smith. "Clear out, and let us grey-beards plot how to alter the destinies of empires, how to make the great Pacific the training ground for young British sailors, and its islands an Anglo-Saxon Federation of the South."

But the engineer had gone, and, changing his manner, the youthful officer said to Raymond: "Do you know the old man's plans?"

"Not yet," Raymond answered; "he hasn't told anyone yet."

"Oh yes, he'll have told Henderson long ago; but we've got to manage this business without letting them know we are doing it. They are inclined to be too cautious in their movements, although, mind you, I am not saying that better men than the old man and Henderson could be found anywhere. Now, here is my plan, and tell me what you think of it, and if you are game to play your part. We'll land on the islands, and capture that big Chief Tamii and put you in his place. You can talk the lingo, and some coffee stain on your face is a cheap price to pay for being made a king. I'll be your prime minister, and we'll draft up a letter asking the Commonwealth to take

our dear country, the sufferings of whose people make our royal heart bleed, under its protecting wing. That will give Australia all the excuse she needs, and she will inform the world that the New Scotia group is henceforth part and parcel of the Australian Commonwealth, and that she will deem it an unfriendly act should any other power do anything else than mind its own business."

"I like your idea," Raymond said, "but I can see one or two weak points in it. Although we capture one chief and impersonate him, the other powers will refuse to recognize his right to speak for the whole group. There are a great many islands, you know, and some of them have even been settled on by French and British traders. France and Germany would simply get some other petty chief to ask them for protection, and the position would remain as it is now."

"Yes, you're right; and we can't carry away all the chiefs. What do you suggest?"

"I would like to hear the captain's idea before I gave any opinion," said Raymond wisely. "You see, I am not well versed in questions of international law, and at the present moment I don't know the difference between ourselves and pirates."

"There isn't any, my dear boy, only that is a

The Run to New Caledonia 69

nasty name. Let us call ourselves empire builders instead; it means nearly the same thing, anyway, and sounds better."

"All right! but let us go on deck now and see where we are. I have to take an inventory of the ship's cargo and stores as soon as possible, and see about some other little matters which belong to the duties of a purser."

The two youths went on deck and continued their conversation leaning on the gunwale, evolving, during the next hour, many startling plots that would have made even a successful sensational novelist gasp at their originality. Meanwhile the *Mota* continued to make her twelve knots without any apparent effort. She was a strange little ship in many ways, and probably would not have been classed A 1 at Lloyd's without some interesting information being given to the world. She bore "Sydney" on her stern as her port of registry, but in her engine room was the nameplate of a famous Clyde firm. She was obviously a trader designed for navigating coral lagoons and negotiating the passages in many white-capped reefs of the South Seas, but she had a much deeper draught than was usual among trading vessels, and her engines were about twice as powerful as those of other ships of her size. She was one

hundred and eighty feet in length, and had a beam amidships of twenty-two feet six inches. But it was her boilers that seemed the most out of place on board a leisurely South Sea trader. They were of the latest water-tube type, and were designed to work up, with forced draught, to a pressure of two hundred pounds per square inch, a pressure common only on torpedo craft. She had the usual deck-houses amidships, and a fore and an aft hatch; her forecastle lay rather low. Two masts, on which were mounted derricks, rose above her decks, and a black funnel with two white bands sprang up rakishly from about midship.

Raymond gazed over the sparkling blue waters while the inventive junior officer expounded his brilliant ideas. He was listening, but he was also contrasting his present position with his hopeless and aimless state of being twenty-four hours previously. Then the world had no use for him; now he was engaged in an enterprise that would make the peoples of all civilized nations recast their ideas of the twentieth century being too prosaic for romantic happenings—if they but knew.

But they would never know. If they were successful nothing would be said; Germany and France would place another black mark against

The Run to New Caledonia 71

the name of Britain, and cover their chagrin with the best smiles they could call up; whereas, if they failed, they would be shot or strung up to the yard-arm as filibusters of no nationality. In any event, nothing would ever be said to the world by any of the parties concerned. There were thirty-one souls on board the *Mota*, but from captain to the assistant cook every man was picked with a view to other work than would fall to his lot on board a trading vessel. Still, life was very pleasant sailing over the calm waters of the Pacific, sheltered from the fierce rays of the sun by a double awning which extended the entire length of the ship.

"Well, boys," suddenly spoke the captain's voice cheerily, "we're getting good weather for a start, at any rate. Fairfax, I want to ask you if you came to any conclusion as to whether these German people really knew that the *Mota* was up to some game, or if they only thought she might be."

"I think, sir, they knew she was on some special mission that meant no good to them, but I do not think they knew exactly what that mission was, or how it was to be carried out."

"No, they couldn't know that, for I never confided in anyone until yesterday morning, and it was

before that that we discovered we were watched. Of course that spy fellow I had as second officer may have guessed something before Henderson found him out and fired him; but he couldn't know, and I was thinking that it was maybe only the articles in the *Herald* and *Telegraph* that set your B and C secret agents on edge."

"I didn't see the articles, sir; I didn't get an opportunity. But I don't think the C people even suspected the *Mota*. They certainly did not mention her when I was listening."

"Probably because they were talking for the benefit of the B fellows only, and didn't want to give away what they may have thought was exclusive information. You see, the papers dealt pretty severely with Britain for drawing out of the New Scotian Convention and leaving Australia to face the prospects of having a powerful foreign base at her doors. They cut up a bit rough over the matter, and said it was high time Australia had her own fleet, and thus be independent of the old country. Of course all that is a dodge to show that Britain is honest even at the expense of her great oversea empire, and it also provides a good excuse for what may follow if we do our part. All the same, I think the papers overdid it, and when they went on to hint darkly that Australia was

The Run to New Caledonia 73

determined to be Queen of the South in spite of all foreign attempts to set up colonies among the islands, they gave the suggestion that she was already taking steps towards that end. Then, when the rumours went about that the new South Sea trader, the *Mota*, had been built for special service, and had engines like a torpedo boat, the fat was in the fire. Of course our people denied that she was anything but a modern trader built to make the greatest profit possible, and we ran her bows right up on Circular Quay to show there was nothing to hide about her. But Mr. Peters got to know through our own secret agents that we were suspected, and you boys know the rest."

The captain was silent for a moment, then, altering his tones, and assuming the dignity of a commander of a North German Lloyd liner, he said: "Mr. Smith, will you take some men and see about the stowing of the cargo which was hurriedly thrown down the hatches last night? Mr. Fairfax, you will please complete your inventory as soon as possible. Mr. Henderson will instruct you in any duties with which you may possibly not be familiar."

The two youthful adventurers signified that his orders would receive immediate attention, and the captain then walked forward to talk with Mr.

Melville, who had just come on deck from the engine room.

At dinner that evening the captain announced that their first port of call would be Noumea in New Caledonia. He made the announcement quietly, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for a vessel having designs on islands claimed by France to sail into the great French port of the Pacific.

"Isn't it a bit risky, sir?" Mr. Hordern asked. "We'll have to show our papers, and the authorities may stick a big cruiser alongside us."

"Our papers are quite in order, Mr. Hordern," replied the captain, "and it is only by committing an apparently foolish action, as we are going to do, that suspicion against us can be killed. The cables will have informed Noumea already that we have sailed, and you may be sure we are even now well watched."

"Just what I thought," Mr. Melville remarked. "I didn't know of any big boats in these parts except the Union Liners of New Zealand, and there is none of them about just now that could hang on to a twelve-knot craft; and that thing astern has had us in sight since daybreak, although they don't appear to be forcing at all."

"No, she can make her sixteen and a half knots

The Run to New Caledonia 75

without going beyond her hundred tons of coal a day," said Henderson calmly. "She is the *Polynesian*, and she is shadowing us."

Raymond started as he realized that they were being followed. Several times during the day he had thought he had seen a faint haze of smoke far astern, but as no one had commented upon it, he had concluded he was mistaken, and, not caring to display his ignorance of matters pertaining to the sea, had said nothing.

"Yes, that is the *Polynesian* all right," agreed the captain. "One of the men sighted her twin telescope-like funnels from the masthead an hour ago. I suppose her skipper thought we weren't worth minding, and came up a bit closer than was wise, if they meant to keep out of sight."

"But may not the *Polynesian* be continuing her voyage from Marseilles simply?" asked Melville. "Sydney is not the terminal port of the Messageries Maritimes."

"It is for her," answered the captain. "The *Pacifique* connects with her from Sydney to Noumea, but her sailing date is not till the end of next week. You may take it, lads, that the big Frenchman behind is keeping an eye on us. The Messageries Maritimes people are heavily subsidized by the French government, and most likely

the *Polynesian* has received sudden orders from their agents in Sydney to keep us in sight. She would clear out as soon as we were missed last night, and likely there will be a German boat somewhere around too."

"But isn't it possible that the big French boat may have a cargo of military stores for Noumea," asked Raymond, "and is taking it over herself so as to avoid it being seen transhipped in Sydney?"

"A good guess, boy, but not quite the bull's eye. Doubtless she has a lot of government gear on board, but she is keeping behind us on purpose to watch us. Why, her speed ought to have put her more than hull down ahead by this time."

"I understand," said the engineer quietly. "She'll keep astern too."

"So that is why we are going to Noumea!" laughed Hordern. "The last time I was there I helped a poor beggar to escape from the convict settlement in the harbour. I think he was an Algerian who hadn't seen eye to eye with the French government in his native land, and consequently was sent out to New Caledonia to ponder over the evil of his ways."

"Did you get him clear away?" asked Henderson.

The Run to New Caledonia 77

"I got him out of New Caledonia, but at the time I was outward bound, so I left him with a couple of British traders and vanilla growers on one of the New Scotias. I intended to pick him up later and take him to Sydney, but as I lost my ticket at the end of that voyage and took up tram-car ticket-punching as a profession, I never got the chance. Trams don't run so far out from Sydney as the New Scotias."

"What island did you leave him on?" asked the captain, slightly interested.

"Oh, one of those that have four different names. I never tried to remember the German, French, or native name. Our fellows knew it as Fat Jack's place. Fat Jack and his brother were the two traders I mentioned."

"Well, you will have a chance of renewing your acquaintanceship shortly," the captain laughed. "Fat Jack's place is our first port of call after Noumea. We have a dozen gramophones and some bales of coloured cotton on board for him, I think."

"And a case of cheap looking-glasses, and a gross of diabolo sets," said Raymond, who had completed his inventory.

"Is it wise to go openly to any of the New Scotia group just now?" asked Mr. Melville. "I

would have thought that our visits there were best done without carrying cargo?"

"We're not going to carry any cargo to the islands," the captain replied significantly. "We may take some away; but if we do it will be live cargo, and it will not come under the purser's department."

"But Fat Jack's goods——" began Raymond.

"Will be transhipped at Noumea with a few other things for other people. The little French steamer can take them on, and we'll load up with whatever we can get for Suva in Fiji, our next official port," the captain continued.

"But I thought you said that Fat Jack's island was our first port of call?" cried Raymond.

"I did, young man, but you will kindly take no note of that fact in any of your books. I said Suva was our first official port, and it is. We are going to visit Fat Jack's island in the middle of the night, and under forced draught, and our stay will be too short to trouble about recording it. The ways of the heathen Chinese are not more dark nor more peculiar than our ways, my boy."

"Ah, well, I'll get aloft and relieve young Smith," said Henderson, rising from the table.

"He'll be thinking about turning round and going

The Run to New Caledonia 79

over to pay a call on the *Polynesian* if I don't let him off now."

"And as this is Sunday night, we might have a hymn or two to cheer us," suggested Mr. Melville. "They will make us feel that we are not bloodthirsty pirates."

And a few hymns they had, both the captain and the chief engineer singing with the earnestness of little children. The engineers not on duty were brought in to help, and Raymond accompanied on the first-rate piano which graced the saloon. Forward among the crew a similar service was already in full swing, and Raymond marvelled as he thought of the strange incongruity of men singing hymns of praise who were even then engaged in a filibustering expedition, at least, such it would be termed if they were caught.

The evening passed quickly, and the rhythmic beat of the screw, sounding out loudly when the singers paused, seemed to promise a hope that all might yet be well.

When Raymond turned in that night his mind was full of conflicting thoughts, yet more of a questioning nature than unpleasant. He wondered if he would see his uncle in Fiji; he had never seen him, and wondered what he would be like. Then his thoughts went back to the German whose head

he had treated so roughly with the iron bar. Would he ever see him again, and what would happen if they did meet? The strange natures of his comrades next took up his attention, and he wondered how they had been brought together, and if their introduction to the sad-faced and gentle Captain Murchison had been as strange as his own. Finally, he fell asleep, and dreamt he was the king of a new island empire of the south, and was about to form an alliance with Australia and New Zealand to fight all the European powers on behalf of Great Britain. He felt sure that the United States of America would lend a friendly hand, and already fleets were on the way to help him from the federated South African States and Canada. This imperial dream somehow became merged into another in which he was driving an elaborate tram-car over the frozen waters of the Pacific, pursued by the French and German armies. He had just dodged them amidst the vegetation of a lovely coral island, when the conductor came up and asked for his ticket. This was too much even for a dream, so he promptly awoke and saw Smith, who shared the cabin with him, getting ready to go on duty. All the officers of the *Mota*, excepting the very juvenile third, had held master's certificates at one time, so the watches were not arranged

The Run to New Caledonia 81

strictly according to the etiquette of a P. & O. Liner.

"I'll come with you," Raymond cried, jumping out of his bunk. "I want to see the sun rise over the Pacific."

"Hurry up then, and I'll teach you all about navigation before my watch is half through."

The two went on deck, thence to the bridge, where Smith relieved Hordern.

"The Frenchman is still there," the second officer remarked, pointing over the stern. "I saw her masthead light an hour ago. Some of the watches are not very careful, it seems, or they wouldn't allow her to come into sight so often and then fall away again."

When he went below, Smith began to initiate Raymond into the mysteries of 'great circle sailing', completely ignoring all the less ambitious branches of the art which might have been understood by Raymond, and in the middle of a learned discourse on the subject, the horizon on the star-board bow began to glow as if it were on fire.

"That is the sun coming," Smith paused to say. "We are just twenty degrees west of the starting-place of day, so that when you see the old sun kick itself clear of the sea over there, you'll know that it has only been eighty minutes out of bed,

or rather that yesterday is only twenty degrees west from here—four minutes to a degree, you know.”

“But I thought to-day began after midnight last night?” put in Raymond, slightly puzzled.

“Oh, in a way it did! That’s what simple-minded people have to be taught, because they could never grasp the fact that the hundred and eightieth meridian is the line between yesterday and to-day. You see, noon is the only true standard; we call that twelve o’clock, whereas on the equator it should only be six o’clock. What we call midnight would then be eighteen o’clock, and the hour when the earth had completed its revolution and was about to start another spin would be twenty-four o’clock.”

“I understand,” said Raymond gravely; “but wouldn’t that method of reckoning time cause some complications at some more or less important countries nearer the poles than the equator? If we called the first hour of sun one o’clock, and the sun, as it does, I believe, in some places, remained up for, say, eighteen hours, we should soon have the sun shining in the middle of the night.”

“You’re away on the wrong tack. I didn’t say sunrise should be the first hour anywhere but on the equator. Noon is the fixed hour, and that would

The Run to New Caledonia 83

be the same on any given meridian at all points between the two poles. Call six hours before that one o'clock, and six after twelve o'clock, and there you are."

"But on the bridge you won't be, you chattering world reformer," growled a voice from the deck, and the captain ascended to the bridge. His cabin was just under the bridge, and doubtless he had been kept awake by the voices of the two overhead.

But as the irate skipper stepped off the ladder, the sun shot up over the edge of the dancing waters, and the darkness of night merged into daylight with startling suddenness. The captain paused in the middle of the first word in a speech of admonition, and then forgot all about the purpose which had brought him to the bridge. A steamer was sailing down the sunlit track towards them, and it needed no great intuition to tell that she was a German gunboat.

"Why, where could she have come from?" cried Smith, who knew at once the nature of the vessel which had sailed out of the darkness.

"She's been lying near Norfolk Island, I expect," the captain answered, "and likely got a cable from Sydney to look out for us. She looks a nasty brute, but honest traders like us do not fear her

kind. Run up the flag, Smith, and dip her good-morning when we are abreast."

The German, however, did not appear to be particularly interested in the *Mota*, and passed about a hundred yards off on the starboard, replying promptly to the greeting which Smith sent with a courtesy not common among the German mercantile fleet.

"She is pretending she is only out for exercise," laughed the captain. "I wish she had stopped us, though, it would have satisfied them we were of no account, and shown us that they were looking for us. Ah, well, she'll get a start when she sights the *Polynesian*, and we may flatter ourselves that we are well attended."

Soon after, breakfast was announced, and when it was over, those not on duty amused themselves by playing at deck cricket and other games until the changing of the watches at noon. The afternoon was passed in the same way, Raymond wondering when he was to get a chance to justify his existence on board the *Mota*.

Thus the days passed. The faint smoke cloud still followed behind, but never came near enough for its cause to be fully determined, and on the fifth day a long range of forest-clad mountains rose out of the sea ahead, which Hordern told Raymond was

The Run to New Caledonia 85

the backbone of New Caledonia, and two hundred and thirty miles in length. At noon they sailed through a gap in a surf-crowned reef towards the southern end of the island, and after steaming for nearly two hours across the lagoon beyond, entered Noumea Harbour. Almost before the anchor had clattered to the bottom, the port officials were on their way towards them in a petrol launch.

The captain, chief officer, and purser met them at the gangway.

"So you have come here!" cried a little man in military uniform, with a long sword half trailing behind him. "Vere ees your black flag and the skull and cross bones, and how much you want not to ze town bombard?" He seemed greatly amused, and answering him in the same strain Captain Murchison replied:

"We haven't any skulls or cross bones, monsieur. Our cargo for Noumea consists of some cases of general merchandise, a crate of bicycles, and some goods for transhipment to the New Scotias. We have had no illness on board since leaving Sydney, and hope to clear for the Fijis to-night if all is well."

"Oui, oui, dat ees all right. You go up alongside and discharge him, and I will look through ze ship to see if find I can any big guns. Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha!" laughed everyone, the *Mota's* officers, if possible, laughing louder than the others.

"What is the joke?" the captain asked, after he had stopped laughing. "Anybody hurt?"

"Ze joke, as you call him," laughed one of the men, "ees dat ze German consul here told us to watch you and send one gunboat out to look for you, and here you come into port yourself."

"And why not?" demanded the captain. "Isn't this an open port? I've been here before, anyway."

"Mais oui, but ze Germans he say you come steal him a march, you call it. We think he means steal ze New Scotias, so we laugh."

Again all laughed, and the inspection of the ship having been completed to everyone's satisfaction, the *Mota* picked up her anchor and sailed slowly past the great prison barracks on the harbour islands, finally berthing safely alongside a wharf.

Soon after, the *F.M.S. Polynesian* steamed in; evidently she had come up at full speed when the *Mota's* destination had become apparent.

"Raymond," the captain said, as they were discharging, "you can speak French fairly well. Go on shore in civilian garb and hang round the saloons and shipping offices, and keep your ears

The Run to New Caledonia 87

open. Be back here at sundown. I may tell you frankly that I don't trust the Frenchmen."

"May I get off too, sir?" The speaker was Smith. He had overheard Raymond being commissioned to go ashore.

The captain thought a moment. "Yes," he agreed finally, "you may both go, but remember you are on duty, not on holiday, and I want to find out what the Frenchmen really know. We sail to-night, even if we have to go out under the guns of that man-o'-war."

CHAPTER IV.

The "Mota" Shows her Heels

RAYMOND thought Noumea the strangest town he had ever seen; but as he had not seen towns outside New South Wales previously, perhaps that feeling was not so very remarkable.

"And is this really a French city?" he asked Smith, as they sauntered along on the shady side of the main street. "I see nothing French-like but the names above those drinking and billiard saloons."

"Then what would you call these fellows coming towards us now? Look at the fancy twirl of their moustaches, and see the cut of their clothes. Watch how they shrug their shoulders too. Then look across the road at these women coming out of that shop. Where will you find such pretty women, so attractively dressed and shod, and with such manners, out of France? Observe, too, how these men are performing almost acrobatic feats with their bowing and hat raising to the ladies."

"But this is not France. One would have

The "Mota" Shows her Heels 89

thought that French people would be different on a South Sea island. Surely, too, they could dress more suitably than in these stiff garments?"

"My dear untravelled kid," began Smith, with the air of a weary world-wanderer of sixty years of age, "I may tell you that notwithstanding what is popularly believed, it is only the British who adapt themselves to new conditions, and who can colonize worth a cent. These people are here only until they can get a chance to return to France. They will never look upon New Caledonia as their home. Just imagine what Australia or New Zealand would be like if they had been developed by any other people than ourselves. No, my boy, the Frenchmen will never build up a colonial empire, simply because they always look forward to the time when, fat and wealthy, they can return to their native land. But we'll continue that subject after I get the old man or Melville to tell me some more. They are full up to the brim about the rights of the Anglo-Saxon to inhabit the earth, and especially the South Seas."

The couple walked on, and Raymond began to pay a more critical attention to the great French colonial city. It did not strike him as being anything like what he had pictured it to be, and seemed more like a big barracks than

anything else. It was hot and dusty and shadeless, and only the saloons appeared to be doing any trade, a fact at which Raymond soon ceased to wonder when a parching thirst came over him. This he appeased by a long draught of iced pine-apple syrup, which seemed to be a very popular beverage among the people, and then they continued on their tour of exploration. The chief thing that Raymond noticed as being odd was the great bands of convicts everywhere. Some enjoyed comparative freedom, and among this class were political offenders and turbaned Arabs from Algeria. A second class seemed to be under surveillance of some kind, as a few men in gorgeous uniforms and wearing ridiculously long swords were always in evidence where these people were seen. A third set were the real convicts and workers of the colony. They moved about the city in gangs, performing various duties under the charge of escorts armed with more modern and more business-like weapons than swords. Clearly Noumea was but a penal settlement in which prisoners and jailers formed the population to the extent of about nine or ten thousand and three or four thousand respectively. As the boys walked along the broad, straight, and sun-baked streets which were flanked by low wooden erections—mostly saloons—with

The "Mota" Shows her Heels 91

corrugated iron roofs, they wondered more than ever why the French had made so little attempt to make the most of their city. It seemed, indeed, as if only the English merchants had taken any pains to beautify their premises, and Raymond could see that these enterprising people, of whom there were a good number, did most of the trade of the place.

"I wouldn't give a back-block township in New South Wales for the whole island," Raymond said, after they had gone round the four sides of the square which formed the town. "There seems to be a row of villas stretching along that road out there; I suppose the officers and their families stay in them?"

"You're right, Raymond," interrupted Smith. "Look, there is the Port Officer coming out of the nearest one. Suppose we follow him and see what happens. The old man thinks he is not straight, you know, and we may as well hear what he says among his friends as do anything else."

Raymond nodded a response, and the two turned after the officer. He led them back along the main street to a saloon near the quay, which he entered. When the youths followed they found him seated at a little table placed so as to be in the

path of a current of air produced by an electric fan suspended from the roof. There were over a dozen groups of people in the stone-floored saloon, but the Port Officer sat alone and apart from all the others, although it was evident that he was well acquainted with most of them.

The boys seated themselves at another table, and Raymond ordered in his best French two long glasses of an iced-vanilla concoction, and this was supplied to them with two long straws in each glass with which to sip the drink.

"I say," Smith whispered to Raymond, "my French is a bit mongrel, so you had better do the listening and leave me to do the watching."

"All right! that military fellow at that table near the door has just asked our man to come over and have a glass of wine with him, and our friend has replied that he is waiting on the captain of the *Polynesian* and some others."

"And by Hordern's tramcar, here the very man comes! I know the *Polynesian* old man well by sight."

A kick from Raymond reminded him that most of the people present had a fair knowledge of English, and he became silent.

The *Polynesian's* captain came up to the Port Officer's table and, after some elaborate perform-

The "Mota" Shows her Heels 93

ance of hat raising and bowing had passed between the two, sat down beside him, and filled glasses, with the indispensable straws, were quickly placed before them by an extremely deferential waiter.

Shortly afterwards another man joined the party. He appeared to be, from his dress, the commander of one of the gunboats lying in the harbour, and a third glass was at once placed before him.

The boys prepared to listen, for it was clear to them from the general comments in the saloon that the meeting of the trio was one fraught with importance to the people of Noumea.

"Well, my dear friend," remarked the *Polynesian* captain in French, addressing the Port Officer, "what do you make of the story?"

"Nothing," came the answer. "She is harmless, and is clearing for Fiji to-night."

"Should I sink her by accident when she is sailing over the mines in Bastile Channel?" asked the third member of the party, lighting a cigarette.

"That is as you think best," laughed the Port Officer, with a suggestive shrug of his shoulders and a self-deprecating wave of his hand. "Accidents will happen anywhere, and of course we would give all the help possible to save the crew.

Sometimes in one's country's cause one has to act on suspicion."

"I don't think we need trouble about the—ah, I forgot there must be no names mentioned—ship in question," put in the captain. "I believe it is all a German scare, and she has come straight from Sydney, as I know; and why should she do that if she had ulterior designs on our islands?"

"Well, gentlemen," said the commander, "after to-night it will not matter, for we are ready now for the coup. The *Seine* sails to-night for the islands, and her commander will, at the urgent request of Vatii, the chief of the southern portion of the group, proclaim them a French protectorate. The *Seine* will carry Vatii back to ratify the arrangement here, and after that, if Germany says a word, she will have to fight. France is ready."

"But they might capture Tamii," suggested the Port Officer, "and as he is the most powerful chief, it is he who is entitled to say whether he wants protection or not."

"Tamii is not such a fool as to allow any European power to have anything to do with him," laughed the commander, "and it would need more ships and men than the worthy Kaiser has in the Pacific to deal with him."

The "Mota" Shows her Heels 95

"How about Kalii?" asked the captain. "When I was in charge of the old *Armand Behic* he was pretty lively in the north islands."

"Oh, he's likely been eaten by someone!" the Port Officer replied. "We should be hearing of him often if he were still at the head of his murderous man-eaters; though I believe they are vegetarians now."

"No, the Kaiser's men can't do anything," the commander said. "He has only one boat down in the south this side of the Fijis, and she is nearly as old as Noah's Ark."

"And she was making for Sydney when we saw her last," added the captain. "But, gentlemen, I must be on board to receive some guests at six o'clock. May I hope to have the honour of receiving you on deck later?"

"It is with exceeding grief, my dear friend, that I have to announce my inability to be present," answered the commander, almost moved to tears, "but I have to give final orders to the officer in charge of the *Seine*. I'll tell you in a word or two. The *Seine* will make her best speed out to-night, after dark, and get to Vatii's island by to-morrow night. Nothing hereabouts could get there before her now, for the German boat is at present in Sydney, and to obviate the risk of any

vessel leaving here in time to get there before the *Seine's* work is done, you, Mr. Port Officer, can issue an order at once that no ship can be allowed to leave Noumea until sunrise to-morrow as the mines in the entrance channels are to be tested to-night. What do you think of the scheme, my dear friends?"

The commander beamed upon his companions, and the *Polynesian's* captain ordered the glasses to be refilled.

"Do you know what Napoleon Bonaparte is saying?" Smith asked Raymond. "His tongue rattled like an old tramp's steering-gear, but I didn't understand one word."

"Smith," said Raymond anxiously, "I have heard a most remarkable story, and the *Mota* must sail out almost immediately. It is close on sundown now, but I must hear the end of the story. Will you run now and tell the captain to get ready to sail? I will follow when I hear the last."

"Great Southern Cross! Is it as bad as that?" ejaculated Smith.

"Yes; tell the captain that a French boat is leaving to-night to seize the islands, and that the harbour is to be closed after it sails."

"Gentlemen," the Port Officer's voice sounded,

The "Mota" Shows her Heels 97

"to the everlasting fame of La Belle France!"
The three men stood up and raised their glasses.

"And to the success of the *Seine*!" added the commander. The glasses were drained at a gulp, and with much polite ceremony the trio separated, having made arrangements to meet and breakfast together in the morning. Smith had already departed, and after sitting at his table for a minute or two so as not to cause comment or draw attention, Raymond also strolled carelessly from the saloon. Once outside he hastened his steps, and ten minutes later he ran up the *Mota's* gangway breathlessly and rushed below.

All the officers, and the first and second engineers, were assembled in the saloon trying to understand the story that Smith was excitedly telling. He, however, could only repeat what Raymond had told him, and add his own opinion, and this was so startlingly outrageous that his listeners did not know what to think. The captain, nevertheless, had given some orders, and the firemen had the steam in the *Mota's* boilers pressed to the utmost, that point at which just a suspicion of dry vapour blew through the safety valves into the sultry night air. The sun had gone down half an hour ago.

When Raymond entered, all turned eagerly to

him. "Just get yourself cool before you say a word," said the captain kindly. "Smith has given us the main points already."

"I am cool, sir," Raymond replied. "I couldn't be on board at sundown, as you ordered, because in the interests of the work we have on hand I had to hear all I could about the Frenchmen's plans."

"That's all right, my lad; all my men are allowed a certain amount of freedom to reason for themselves. You did well, and we'll now hear what you have to say."

"It is soon told, sir, although the other people took a long time discussing their plans. The *Seine*, wherever she is, leaves to-night at top speed for the New Scotias, where, by some previous arrangement, a chief called Vatii will meet it and ask its commander to take the islands under French protection. They think that will finish the business, as they will bring Vatii back to Noumea to ratify the arrangement, and consequently no other power can interfere, seeing it is the desire of the people themselves. They know that, at the present moment, outside their harbour, there are no fighting ships nearer than Sydney belonging to any power, and they intend to blow up any suspicious craft—meaning the

The "Mota" Shows her Heels 99

Mota, of course—that puts out after the *Seine* has sailed. That is all the story, and the Port Officer is to proclaim the port closed to-night for mine practice, so as to hide the real meaning of preventing any likely vessels from sailing."

Raymond took a drink of water and sat down, and Smith ran on deck in anticipation of sailing orders, for it was his watch, and he did not intend that either Henderson or Hordern should have the honour of taking the *Mota* out, probably over mines and under the fire of the three cruisers in port, to say nothing of the fort's guns.

The captain's face was drawn and haggard. "Do any of you know the *Seine*?" he asked. "Vatii is the chief on Fat Jack's island."

"I know the *Seine*, sir," said Hordern. "She chased me that time I cut out the fellow of whom I told you. She is a tenth-class gunboat, and can make, if they do their best to burst the boilers, about thirteen knots."

"We don't need to fear the *Seine*, sir," put in Mr. Melville. "Her engines are only the old compound type, and her boilers are a twenty-year-old experiment of some faddist who had charge of the naval engineering department at Toulon at the time. The *Mota* can run rings round her."

"That's so," added Henderson. "But her

commander, Lieutenant D'Arton, is one of the most reckless dare-devils who ever lived. He is not a bad sort all the same, but we may depend on it that he'll drive the old tub faster than most people would think hopeful for a long continuance of the crew's wages."

"Then, gentlemen, I propose clearing out now," said the captain. "Some of the port authorities will be round directly notifying all ships that the harbour is closed for the night. We've got some cargo on board from Noumea to Fiji, and there is no use of our waiting in port longer."

"Right!" agreed Mr. Melville. "I'll stand by the engines myself, and my second can see the forced-draught arrangement in working order in the stokehole. Luckily I got coal on board this afternoon."

"And I know a passage out round these prison islands that is not mined," said Hordern cheerily. "I scraped the bottom all the way once, and if there had been mines laid I wouldn't be here to-day."

"I know that passage too," said the captain thoughtfully, "but we draw more water than we could get in it. No, we must risk the Bastile Channel. We must get to Fat Jack's island before the *Seine*, or we may as well throw up the sponge."

The "Mota" Shows her Heels 101

"The Bastile Channel let it be then," cried Henderson. "I'll take the wheel now; that young beggar Smith wouldn't mind ramming the walls of the fort if he got a chance."

"I'll take the *Mota* out myself," the captain said quietly; "but we must not go before the *Seine*, or her people might suspect. Mr. Henderson, take your night glasses and watch her. Mr. Hordern, see that the moorings are cast off; and Raymond, you might go on shore to the office at the end of the quay and get these papers signed. The clerks there will not yet know about the harbour-closing order, and we'll get out to mid-stream where we can't be told ourselves. Tell whoever signs the clearance papers that we're sailing before morning."

Instantly all was activity on board the *Mota*. The officers knew their duties, and the engineers were ready. Henderson went among the crew and explained to them as much as he thought necessary to ensure their hearty co-operation, and Hordern saw about all mooring-ropes being made ready to slip. Raymond took the ship's clearance papers to the customs authorities as directed, and called up his best French to explain that the *Mota's* captain wished to sail sometime before daylight, as the currents ran less strongly in the outer reef during the early hours, and the *Mota's* engine power had

not yet been tested long enough to allow him to risk his ship when the currents were at their strongest.

"That is what comes of having cheap work," the officer in charge answered with a laugh. "You Australians get your boats built on the Clyde, or somewhere where you can get them cheapest. If your people had paid a few pounds more for their barge they could have got Belville boilers and decent engines fitted in, which would have driven it through the New Scotia's mountain ranges."

"But we don't wish to do that," Raymond said with a smile, "and poor trading people can hardly afford torpedo-boat destroyers on the profits of carrying a few pianos or bicycles to Noumea or Fiji, and a load of yams or bananas back."

"You speak passable French for an Australian."

"My master was a Frenchman, and languages were my hobby."

"Well, there are your documents, and I say, you might bring me back a native war-drum from the Fijis. I promised to send one home to Paris to a nephew of mine who thinks Fiji and New Caledonia are across the road from each other. I will pay whatever you are out when you get in here again."

The "Mota" Shows her Heels 103

"I will do my best to procure one for you," Raymond answered, wondering what a war-drum was; "but I must go now—good-bye for the present!"

"Au revoir, cher ami! Hallo! Some port order is being issued; I see the signal lamps. Better hurry on board and cast off, or you'll be stuck here until they find that New Scotia filibuster supposed to be in port."

"I heard something about that," Raymond said casually, gathering up the papers. "But the whole story seems too ridiculous for anything. This is the twentieth century." He nodded a second good-bye and stepped out into the street, then under cover of the darkness he ran."

"Have you got them?" Captain Murchison's voice enquired as he reached the deck.

"Yes, sir," responded Raymond, "and the order that the port is closed is being signalled now."

"Clear away forward, Mr. Henderson," cried the captain.

"All clear, sir," came the reply through the darkness a moment later.

"Clear away aft, Mr. Hordern."

"All clear, sir," quickly was responded from the after deck.

"Ring down half speed astern, Mr. Smith," the captain continued, addressing the junior officer who stood on the bridge by his side.

Smith sent the necessary signal, and the *Mota's* propeller began to stir up the water of the harbour.

"Hi! Hallo! *Mota* ahoy!" shouted someone on shore. "The port eet ees shut. You not can go out to-night."

"Bet you a pass over the tram lines we can," Hordern, who was nearest the speaker, roared back.

"Ring down half speed ahead now," spoke the captain, ignoring everything but the work in hand. He handled the steering-wheel deftly all the time, and already the vessel had been manœuvred almost clear of the big cargo hulk that had been lying hard on her bows. "Astern again," he continued, after a minute's forward motion, during which the noise on shore had been intensified by the addition of the voices of several port officials, all shouting at once in combined English and French.

But no one paid any attention, and after another period of wash throwing the captain signed to Smith to ring down "ahead". The *Mota* had now a clear passage-way, and swinging her head

The "Mota" Shows her Heels 105

round, the captain steered for the anchorage where she had stopped on first arriving in the harbour.

It was now apparent to the shouting officials on shore that the *Mota* was only moving to a suitable anchorage so as to be ready for a good start at daylight, so they suddenly ceased wasting their lung power and walked away, probably back to the now well-lit saloons to gamble for drinks.

Presently the *Mota's* anchor was dropped overboard, and she began to ride lightly on the slight swell that rolled in through the reef gap far out at sea. The captain then called the officers and engineers together and informed them as to what he proposed to do. His proposals were hailed with approval by all, and thus it followed that when the rickety old gunboat which did duty as coast policeman round New Caledonia began to eject dense clouds of smoke from her twin funnels at an anchorage not far ahead of the *Mota's*, the latter's engineers had also everything ready for a night race over the ocean.

Soon after, Henderson saw the *Seine* glide from her position and head for the open sea. She made a noise like that which one would expect to hear in a boiler factory, the clanking of her engines being plainly heard on board the *Mota*, while sundry other sounds must have disturbed any

reflectively inclined people in the saloons on shore—if there were any such.

The *Mota* was quivering with suppressed energy. She was ready to play her part, and for the first time since her secret trials would be called upon to show what she could do.

“Is everything ready?” asked the captain, as every man went to his previously arranged post.

“Yes,” answered the chief engineer, standing in the entrance to the engine room.

“We all are,” said Henderson grimly. “Say the word.”

“Out with all lights then. Mr. Melville, start your engines and let them run easily. I dare not use the telegraph bell until we are clear of the gunboats and forts, so we will take our chance of smashing into anything. Mr. Henderson, keep the bow lookout, and signal to me, if necessary, with your flash-lamp.”

Silently the anchor was raised, but before it cleared the water the *Mota* was slipping along at a good nine-knot rate. Past the two gunboats which represented the might of France in the Western Pacific, then under the bows of the great cruiser that Power had called from her farthest east outpost of Pacific empire, Tahiti, the little trader glided without a sound.

The "Mota" Shows her Heels 107

And now the line of forts loomed up ahead, and on the starboard lay the enormous prison barracks. The *Seine* was barely two hundred yards in front, and for a moment the idea of rushing past the danger zone at full speed appealed to Captain Murchison. He knew the *Seine* was just crossing the mines, and if he could get close up, the port people would hardly dare risk sinking their own vessel merely to send a harmless trader to the bottom. The foolishness of the mad scheme struck him in a moment. He would simply be showing his hand to no purpose, and another war vessel would come out in pursuit and speedily end all the *Mota's* chances of success with a heavy shot or two.

"Run down and tell the engineer to stop now," he whispered to Smith. "We'll drift past more safely."

Smith disappeared like a shadow, and next moment the regular dull thud of the pistons ceased, and in a quietness only intensified by the creaking, smoke-belching craft in front, the *Mota* swept past between the forts. The nerves of every man on board were strained to the utmost, and all watched for a flash of a lamp or some other sign that would show they were discovered. But the great forts were as silent as themselves,

and next moment they had crossed the danger line and were gliding into the lagoon which lay between the mainland and the outer reef. For some time the men remained silent, and the *Seine* forged ahead towards the gap; but finally, when they realized that they had actually cleared the well-guarded harbour, and had now only the lagoons to cross to gain the open sea, the tension became relaxed, and Hordern, coming forward from the stern, remarked to Raymond: "There is a wonderful bit of excitement in running a blockade, but I think it would be a much easier matter to enter Noumea than to leave it as we have done."

"Silence!" ordered the captain. "A search-light may show us up yet if any suspicions have been aroused. Ring down 'half speed ahead', Smith."

The telegraph bell tinkled, and again the thud of the pistons sounded out at regular intervals. A mile or two were made at half speed, and then, when out of danger, "full speed" was rung down to the engine room, and the *Mota* shivered for a moment and leaped forward. The reef was still a long way off, and the lighthouse which marked the gap had still to be passed. But all hearts were light now, for there was nothing suspicious in

The "Mota" Shows her Heels 109

passing a lighthouse, and the order to close the port did not mean to close the barrier reef.

Still hiding all lights, they crept up on the *Seine* and followed her through the gap without apparently attracting any attention. They were now free on the boundless Pacific, and ready for whatever lay before them. The *Seine* swung to the south after clearing the gap, but kept a course dangerously near the reef for a vessel of her draught. Evidently she intended to round the island and to cut all corners very clean.

Again the captain called the officers together. "We have succeeded so far," he said hopefully, "and now we have to act quickly or lose all we have gained. We will take a course outside that lumbering gunboat and try to round the southern end of the island ahead of her. Then we will make every second we can in a run to Fat Jack's island, taking a course through the Loyalty group by the north point of Mare Island. If fortune does not go back on us we should make our destination to-morrow at midnight, and then our first stroke for our country will be attempted."

The *Mota* was now rushing through the phosphorescent waters at a speed which most people would have thought incredible for a vessel of her size. But they could not know that the little ship

was now answering to the purpose for which she had been built, and that her great engines of latest pattern and high-press tubular boilers were never designed for a mere trader. She was now flying through the ocean under forced draught, but still the thin wisp of steam hung round her safety valves, showing that she still had reserve, or at least was not being overforced.

Two hours later she rounded the mainland of New Caledonia and made a new course for the Loyalty group. The *Seine* had been left far behind, and only her tossing masthead lights were visible when the land finally hid her from view.

"We should gain four hours on her by running time, I calculate," the captain said to Raymond as he left the bridge to his able chief officer, "and we should get an extra couple by being able to cut corners among the Loyalties more finely than she can. I only hope Fat Jack is at home when we get there, and that Chief Vatii has not repented of his bargain with the French."

"And what are you going to do, sir, even supposing we get there five or six hours ahead of the *Seine*?"

"Well, we can't exactly make the rascal ask for our protection, but after you have talked some

The "Mota" Shows her Heels 111

sound logic to him for a bit, we'll see that he doesn't go back to Noumea as a first-class passenger on the *Seine*, and that will upset one apple cart."

"You mean that we will take him?"

"Boy, you would make your fortune as a guesser. That's just what we intend to do. We'll take him away, as gently as possible, of course, and put him outside French influence until the business is settled one way or another. But tomorrow you get all your papers ready for the port of Suva in Fiji, that is our next trading call, and we must be there to nearly schedule time."

The captain passed on to the engine-room entrance and went below to talk to Mr. Melville, and Raymond searched the ship for Smith, to assist him in evolving some new plots. He found that gentleman in bed, and, suddenly remembering that he too was tired, he undressed and also turned in and slept soundly.

Next morning the *Mota* was sailing among low-lying islands, whose palm-covered flats stretched away in the blue distance until lost again in the sea beyond. Beautiful coral beaches surrounded their shores, and the blue waters lapping their edges made a picture in colour such as Raymond had never seen before. Henderson told him that

these were the last of the Loyalty group of islands, and were French, although that Power had not done much to develop them.

"The natives," continued Henderson, "are about the finest fellows in the Pacific. The missionaries have taught them trades, and they have a wonderful gift of acquiring languages. They detest Frenchmen, and will not believe that the French are really white men like the English. I know a rich gold reef on that island, over on the port bow, and if I get enough dollars out of this trip I'll risk them all in trying to work it."

"But will the French allow you to work gold on their islands?" Raymond asked.

"I won't ask them, my boy; but all the same I must say that the French are really decent that way, and probably would not raise any objection if I did ask them. They are a people not easily understood, and have a most unhappy manner with the natives. As comrades they are about the best people one could wish to have."

The officer went on the bridge to relieve Smith, who always seemed to be on some kind of duty, and then Raymond and that gentleman resumed their plotting.

That night at ten o'clock a mountain range seemed to spring from the sea straight ahead; a

The "Mota" Shows her Heels 113

light glimmered on a point halfway up its slopes, and another beacon flared at sea level.

"That is Vatii's island," said the captain, "or, as all traders prefer to call it, Fat Jack's place. Sound the whistle, Mr. Hordern, and you, Mr. Smith, fire off a couple of signal rockets."

CHAPTER V

Vatii's Mistake

"MAY I be stranded on the banks of the dear old Manchester Canal, if you are not the funniest French army or navy I ever saw! Where are your men, and your brass band, and your flag?"

The speaker was a big burly man of about thirty-six years of age. He stood on the coral beach in front of a long, low, warehouse-like structure of corrugated iron, overgrown with some flowering creeping vegetation. His dress consisted of a soft silk shirt and pyjamas, and he was smoking a huge cigar. His words were addressed to the occupants of a boat from the *Mota* which had just been beached.

"Don't you know old friends well enough in the dark to recognize them?" answered Hordern. "I thought Fat Jack would know Britons when he saw them."

"We are sorry to have to make our call after

business hours," said Captain Murchison, "but this is not really a trading visit in the full sense of the word."

"Well, I'll be postmarked if it isn't old Murchison, and Melville, and Hordern, and that little half-civilized rascal Smith!" cried Fat Jack, taking the cigar from his mouth and flashing a lantern on the group. "How in the world did all you wasters get together, and who gave you a boat, and what in New Scotia's name do you mean calling here at this time of night? A mighty wonder it is you didn't leave your steamer on the reef out there. Have you brought my bales of turkey-red and my diablo sets? The natives are rushing me every day for both. But don't stand there all night talking; come inside, and I'll see what refreshments I can get my hands on. I don't suppose you heard anything about a French cruiser coming here to annex the islands? Vatii, the chief, is camped up at that light on the hillside, expecting one every day. He daren't go back among his people or they would eat him, and the poor beggar is getting pretty tired waiting. Have you any papers with you? And how is the old country? What government is in power? Is Manchester the biggest city in the world yet? No, boys, not another word will I hear until

you've had something to eat and drink. Come along."

He led the way into the house, and lighting some lamps, signed to his visitors to be seated. "I'll go and kick up some of the boys," he said. "But that will take some time, as they are mighty strong on the sleeping racket. What! you don't wish me to trouble them? Blow me! don't they sleep all day, and don't I pay them good beads and coloured glass, to say nothing of cheap tobacco and candy, for their work?"

"Please don't until you hear our yarn, Fat Jack," interrupted the captain, afraid that the speaker would keep on talking too long.

"Blow you, skipper, have you not finished yet?" cried Fat Jack in surprise. "You are a mighty powerful talker, and here I am waiting to get a word in—poor Fat Jack, who hasn't spoken a word in English to anyone, except maybe in my sleep, when I might talk to myself, since the last Sydney trader was here, and then it was a greasy old German, although he wasn't a half-bad fellow, who was in charge of her. Great Manchester! I wish I had two mouths, so that I could get in double work when I had a chance. Shut up, you fellows, for a bit, and let me roll my tongue round good old Manchester."

"Jack," began the captain again, "if you'll give me five minutes you may talk like a phonograph afterwards and no one will interrupt."

"All right!" Jack said aggrievedly, setting an American timepiece in front of him. "Go ahead."

"We are here on business that is not considered ordinary trading. If you feel that you must tell the French anything you know, we'll do it without bringing you into it at all."

"I'm a very conscientious man," Jack replied thoughtfully, "but I have a memory like a tub without a bottom. Would you believe it, I nearly forgot to tell you that that Algerian fellow Hordern left with me has turned out a real good sort. The natives all like him, and he can sell more turkey-red in a day among them than old Schmitz, the German trader round the point, or young Jules Terry, the Frenchman whose plantation joins mine, can do in a month. He is watching Vatii now, for he says he'll strangle him before he allows him to ask for French protection. That is a silly notion of his, for I told him if this place belonged to France he could be made customs collector, and grow fat on the plunder he would make. Of course France would never see any of it, and he would get a good screw for collecting the dues besides."

"You are taking up my five minutes," reminded the captain, "and my time is very short."

"What! Have you not finished yet? Captain Murchison, I don't wonder you always had bad luck with your boats; you are far too fond of talking!"

"Those islands are going to be annexed by France or Germany," the captain interrupted. "Whom do you favour? Britain, you may not know, has drawn out."

"Oh, I expected she would do that," Fat Jack responded. "She knows what she is about."

"Then what power do you favour of those remaining?" put in Mr. Melville, determined to rush Fat Jack so much with questions that he would not have any opportunity of talking away from the subject.

"That is a point I have been considering," Fat Jack said. "It should pay me well anyway. If France gets them, as I have already said, she will put a protective tariff on all imports, which will just mean me charging myself, and old Schmitz, and young Terry, for all the stuff we land, and putting the plunder in another pocket. I can easily arrange that I'll be collector, or my friend Raisuli, which is the same thing, and there will be a good screw for doing it, too."

"Then you have decided for France?" asked Hordern.

"I didn't say that, did I?" demanded Fat Jack. "If you weren't all talking so much you might have tumbled to the fact by this time that I think backing Germany would be a better line for me."

"How do you make that out?" asked the captain. "The Germans would flood the islands with their own cheap trash, and your occupation would be taken away."

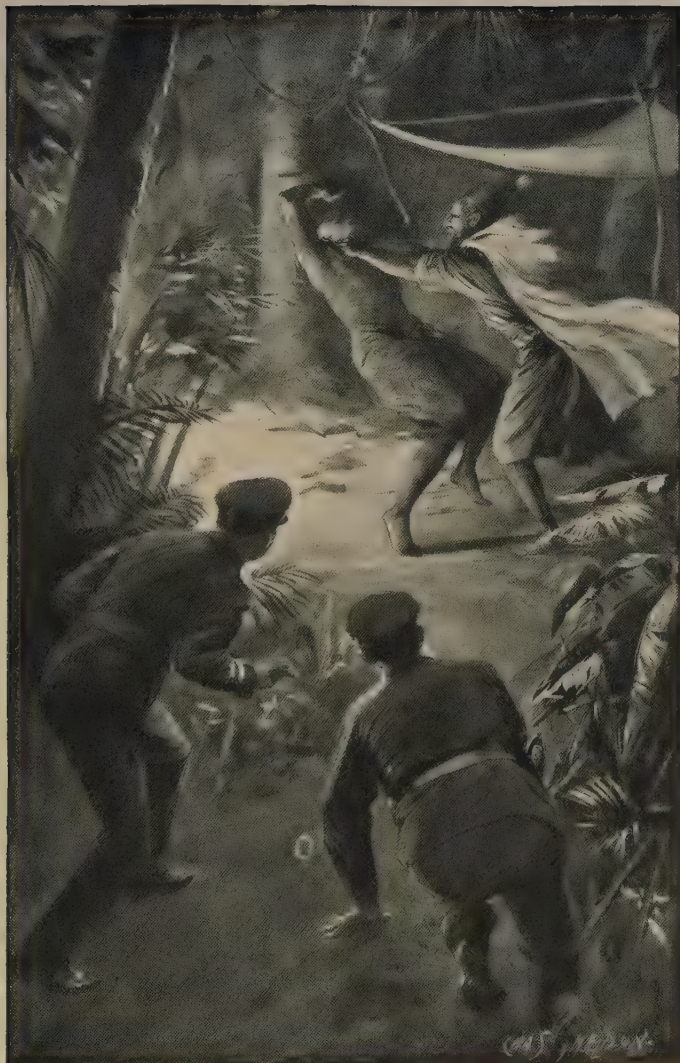
"Hold hard there, Captain; I thought you had more savvy than that. The Germans would dump a lot of stuff here, certainly, but they would do it through me, and in the government's efforts to work up an export trade, as well as an import business, they would pay a bounty—subsidize me, if you like it better—to collect mats, boar tusks, copra, oils, and other native productions, which I could do in my ordinary way of trade. I would therefore have a bigger business than I have now, and get paid twice for my stuff. You don't see it? Well, you must be dense people. See here, if I sell a diabolo set, or a small mirror, or a German concertina, to a native for a mat, or some tusks, or a pound or two of vanilla, or anything else worth to me three or four times what the stuff I gave cost,

I make a fair honest living, as I am doing now, thanks to you traders coming round and dealing with me; but if Germany, to encourage trade with the Fatherland in the islands, also gives a bounty—she'll have to do, or nothing German will ever reach the natives—for all the native products, that will be an additional value in solid German cash to the exchequer of yours truly, Fat Jack, Esquire, late of Manchester. Now, do you see?"

"We do," all his listeners replied together.

"Then, Fat Jack," said the captain, "I may inform you that we have come here to see that the French do not get the opportunity of annexing these islands. A French war-boat of a kind is coming along here now, and will arrive some time before daylight if her boilers don't burst. Before then we must have the chief Vatii in our hands and be off on a course for some other port. You must give us your word of honour as an Englishman that you will not say a word of our having been here, otherwise I am afraid you will have to be our guest too."

Fat Jack laughed till the tears ran down his unshaven cheeks. "If it weren't that I know a good bit more of your business than you have told me, with all your palavering, I would give you all a mighty good hiding for your cheek in telling me



W 934

RAISULI HAD SUDDENLY CAUGHT HIM BY THE THROAT

Page 126

you would make me a prisoner," he said. "Didn't I tell you already that my memory is powerfully bad. Just to give you a hint, too, of how my brain-box is working, and so save you telling more lies and wasting good English words, I will tell you that it would please me to the top button of the waistcoat I haven't got if both Germany and France got knocked out in this island-jumping business."

"How so?" asked the captain. "You would lose the customs and the bounty, and get nothing in return."

"Oh, I am not so sure about that. Neither France nor Germany would allow me to go in for any scheme of development on the land, and it is just possible that a country like, say, Australia would. Look at the market price of vanilla just now, and imagine how much a white man could grow here. I tell you there's fortunes in it. And look at rubber too. These islands were built specially for growing rubber, and Fat Jack is just the man ready to spend a good few sixpences in giving it a trial, if these islands were part and parcel of the great British Empire."

"Then you know something of our mission?" asked the captain, somewhat surprised.

"I don't know a word you haven't told me your-

The Island Traders

selves, but I know that old Britannia doesn't live out in the cold very long if she can get in by a back door or a window. But where has that young beggar Smith gone, and that other youngster of your party?"

"Hullo!" exclaimed Melville, "I never missed them. What mad scheme can they be up to?"

"I'll bet they've gone to make a call on Vatii," said Hordern, who seemed the least alarmed of the group.

"We may safely allow the youngsters to look after themselves," the captain said. "Raymond's good sense will balance Smith's recklessness, whatever they are doing."

"And until they come back with my future partner, Raisuli, and the chief Vatii," put in Fat Jack, "let us go on talking. I want to get a word in, if you fellows would only give me half a chance."

And talk they did, and to some purpose.

Meanwhile Raymond and Smith were putting into effect their first plot. They had soon perceived that Fat Jack's natural desire to have someone with whom he could talk English would delay the object of their mission until it might be too late to bring about its success, and trusting blindly to luck, had signed to Hordern to cover their absence as long as possible, and had gone off.

Their idea was to get Vatii into their hands at the earliest possible moment, and they at once struck up the hillside to where the light, marking the site of his camp, burned brightly. The slope was covered with cocoanut palms, with here and there a clearing in which the indispensable yam was cultivated, and an occasional banana plantation was also passed. But the adventurers had no time to waste in inspecting what they saw. They did not know what animals lay among the dense undergrowths over which they passed, and all their attention was given to where they placed their feet. The new moon shed a faint light over all, and looking back through the trees they could see the *Mota* riding at anchor about a quarter of a mile from Fat Jack's warehouse on the shore. Apparently they were passing through a series of gardens owned and cultivated by the natives who lived near the great white fellow's store, which they doubtless found most convenient for providing them with turkey-red, alarm clocks, and glass beads in exchange for their surplus products. No natives nor native habitations could be seen, however; they were all asleep in their well-hidden little triangular houses overgrown with creepers, and the boys, without giving any thought to them, made the best possible time up the sides of the mountain. At length they

struck a footpath, the hard beaten surface of which allowed of much faster travelling, and suddenly the light of the camp shone out in a clearing only a few yards ahead. Pausing for a moment, the boys considered their next move; they did not know how many people might be in the camp, and poisoned arrows were likely to greet them if they rushed in carelessly.

“We’ll crawl up the rest of the way,” Smith whispered, “and act as seems best when we see how many people there are.”

Before he had finished speaking, the boys were wriggling forward over the rocky ground towards the fire, and soon they reached a spot whence they could hear and see everything that was said and done under the red cloth canopy that served as the chief’s tent and dwelling-place.

There were only two men present, and their appearances were greatly in contrast. Both were tall men, and light brown in colour, but there all resemblance ceased. One was dressed in picturesque loose hanging garments and a fez, and the other’s sole outfit consisted of a coloured bedcover and a short cylinder of polished wood pushed through the cartilage of his nose. The former looked like the original of the Turkish or Moorish brigands seen in pictures, but nowhere else. He had

a fierce black moustache, and eyes which seemed to glow in the dark like pieces of live coal. The latter looked exactly what he was, a broken-down but avaricious South Sea islander who would sell his soul for some pieces of turkey-red or a cheap German organette. They were talking together in sandalwood English, and the watchers easily heard their conversation.

"What for you want oui oui man come here? He take island for himself." The speaker was the brigand-like person whom the boys knew must be the Algerian whom Hordern had helped to escape.

"Oui oui man fine fellow. My word, him he say, Vatii come over big steamer see big big oui oui man in big big village. Vatii git box him speak, git pop pop, an' rifle, an' tick-tick, an' lot lookin'-glasses, an' beads, an' lollies, an' byamby him come over an' kill all Vatii's no frien's, an' Vatii git ums eat. Vatii wait oui oui fellows come for him now. Steamer in down there. My word, Vatii go, you bet! London, Paris, an' Auchtermuchty."

"Vatii he fool!" returned the other contemptuously. "He sell his people to oui oui men for glass beads. Vatii will be kill an' eat himself soon if he come back to warriors. But oui oui men never let Vatii come back. Vatii he slave."

The Island Traders

“Vatii no like you talk that way. Vatii big chief; kill you byamby. Vatii he think he go down to steamer now; oui oui man maybe no able to come up for him.”

“Vatii he go down no steamer,” said the other significantly. “Vatii he die chocky-chocky he move. Savvy that, Vatii?”

“Who you talk Vatii like that? Vatii, he chief; you only Inglis trader’s man. Vatii he go now.”

But Vatii did not go. Raisuli, as Fat Jack had named the Algerian, had suddenly caught him by the throat and thrown him back upon the ground. “Pig!” hissed the escaped political prisoner. “Vatii he pig. Vatii he never see sun rise no more. Vatii—— Allah il Allah!”

The last devout exclamation was not addressed to Vatii. It escaped the speaker’s lips as he in turn was thrown backwards under the weight of what seemed to him like two young lions. These were the two watchers, who had no intention of seeing their plans frustrated even to gratify the tall Algerian. A dead Vatii might be more useful to the French than a live one, as showing the need of a responsible power’s interference in island matters, and justifying their expedition in his favour.

Raisuli did not struggle. "Kismet!" he muttered, and awaited the end stoically. But suddenly he took a renewed interest in life. One of the lions was talking to him in French, and telling him a wonderful story. Then they released him, and he sat up bewildered.

"You talk to him now in sandalwood lingo, Smith," said Raymond. "Explain what is necessary while I turn on the Mota tap for the benefit of Vatii."

"You oui oui fellows?" cried the chief, sitting up when he realized that all danger was away. Raymond answered in the Mota dialect and for the next five minutes tied his tongue in knots telling Vatii what he thought proper under the circumstances.

In the end everything was arranged to the satisfaction of everyone. Vatii was to go down to the steamer with the youthful adventurers, and Raisuli was to wait until the French cruiser came along, and then draw the shore party after him into the forest-clad mountains, in the guise of a fickle-minded Vatii who had repented of his intention to ask for French protection. Raisuli was greatly pleased at the turn things had taken, and when he learned that Hordern was one of the men engaged in the venture to frustrate both France and Ger-

many, his native reserve broke down and he shouted for joy.

"I am grateful," he said in French to Raymond. "If France got these islands I would be sent back to New Caledonia; but if the Australian Commonwealth, the freest country in the world, acquires them, I can send for my own people and live here happy until Allah sends for me. I will help you in every way. Command me."

Raymond instructed him to return to Fat Jack after the Frenchmen left the island, and promised him that if the worst came to the worst he would ask Captain Murchison to remove him to Fiji, where he would be safe under British protection.

"We'll see you again very soon," Raymond said, as they shook hands and parted. "We'll be back again from Fiji in little over a week."

The Algerian responded feelingly, and next minute the two youths and Vatii were on the way down the hill.

"By Sydney Harbour! Raymond," cried Smith in boyish delight, "we're cut out for nihilists, field-marshals, members of parliament, or——"

"Or tramcar conductors," laughed Raymond. "Look at poor Hordern, and how he came down."

"An' you give Vatii tickety-tick, box o' thunder,

cheap German noise machine, and plenty glass beads?" broke in Vatii, who was wondering why he was receiving so little attention.

"Yes," said Smith, "and plenty broken American clocks that won't tickety-tick, plenty motor cars, and lot heap plenty flying-machines. Oh, we'll give Vatii all he wants, and perhaps more."

The suggestiveness of the last words was lost upon Vatii, whose knowledge of even the so-called sandalwood English was not very extensive. Vatii did not know that it was not the *oui oui* men with whom he was walking. The probabilities are that he did not care, so long as he thought he would obtain presents of the many articles so dear to the heart of the Polynesian and his brethren of Melanesia and Micronesia. However, the only difference was that he would be taken to Suva instead of Noumea. Everything else would be the same, and he would be saved from becoming the seller of his country, although probably that point was too nice for his appreciation.

Vatii kept on enumerating the objects of his desire, greatly pleased with the discovery that he had merely to ask for anything, even a knife that would open and shut, and it would be promised him. Clearly he was a chief who had not had much dealings with traders previously, for

his demands were in no way in accordance with those usually made by his more sophisticated fellow chiefs.

However, the white fellows, whether they were the oui oui men or not, had promised to give him everything he asked that was good for him, and didn't cost more than twopence, and he was happy—the white men had given their words.

“By smoke! Ray, I hear some people coming up this path,” spoke Smith suddenly. “I hope we haven't to fight now, after getting so far without trouble.”

“Let us draw in here until we see who they are,” suggested his comrade; and explaining to the chief in his own language that bad fellows were coming up the track, they drew into the shelter of a large banana clump. They had not long to wait. A body of men approached rapidly, one in very scanty dress leading. “By the great canal!” he remarked, coming to a standstill opposite the trio, “this is a game that old Fat Jack likes. Won't the Frenchies have fits? It's a good thing Terry is away trading on the other side of the island just now. He would be sure to tumble to the game.”

“Wait till I get that young beggar Smith!” came a voice from the men. “He's probably

gone and got lost in the bush, and the worst of it is he has Raymond with him."

"Well, Melville," said someone, "he can't lead our purser into bad company at any rate."

"He's perhaps given the show away to Vatii, though," said the captain's voice anxiously, "and we'll never be able to catch him."

"See how I get all the blame," whispered the junior officer to Raymond. "I'll bet they would never believe that the scheme was yours as much as mine."

"What are you talking about now?" demanded Fat Jack aggrievedly. "I never saw such people to talk in my life."

"We're afraid young Smith has frightened Vatii away," said the captain.

"Then you needn't. Raisuli loves him too much to think of allowing him to depart alive."

"You'll find Smith and Raymond have been working while we were sampling Fat Jack's refreshments," said Hordern. "I shouldn't mind betting that we'll meet them coming down with Vatii."

"We'll tie the young rascal to the mast next time we make up a shore party," spoke the chief engineer. "He was meant to stay on board with Henderson this time, I believe, but he hid

in the dinghy until we got clear of the ship. Hallo!"

Raymond had stepped out from the banana clump just as the party were about to resume their uphill march.

"Smith is no more to blame than I am," he said. "We both arranged that we should go out after Vatii when the chance offered, because we thought that your carefully designed plans for his capture might possibly fail through your being too careful."

"Raymond," said the captain, "what have you done? Has he escaped?"

"No," said Smith, stepping out, "he is here. Allow me to present the friend of Raymond and myself, the great chief Vatii, to you all. Vatii, these are a lot of oui oui men, but they're of little account. Come along."

"Oh, you bet, my word! Vatii no time for any men not boss like you. You give me, like Fat Jack, his clothes?"

"Of course," replied the reckless one. "I'll even give you an engineer's uniform, if I can steal one from Melville."

"My boy," cried the last named, "I beg your pardon for wronging you. I feared your impetuosity had ruined our chances."

"No fear, old man. Raymond is like a band brake on a flywheel with me. I mean, he shuts off my steam at the throttle valve. Oh, I can't talk down for engineers to understand. Come on, Vatii."

Raymond had meanwhile explained matters in a few words, and the party turned downhill again, Smith and Vatii leading, the chief humming an air in which the sounds "Nav-a-hoe" recurred frequently.

Suddenly Fat Jack uttered an exclamation of annoyance. "It's time to say good-bye, lads," he cried. "I see a masthead light and two glowing smoke-stack tops coming up from the south, and I'll go the profits of my vanilla plantation they belong to a barnacle-covered French cruiser. You needn't hurry, though; they're two hours off yet, and they'll stick if they try to come through the gap in the reef before daylight—the currents are flowing the other way just now. So we've time to go down and have some more refreshment."

"We'll get that refreshment when we come back, Jack," laughed the captain, now strangely light-hearted. "I don't think we'll wait just now. Look! Henderson is signalling too; he has spotted the *Seine*."

"Here, am I to get a word in at all to-night?"

Fat Jack cried. "You fellows are most unreasonable."

"You'll get a good chance of trying your language on the Frenchmen presently, Jack," said Hordern cheerfully, "and don't you stop speaking even if they want to say something. They'll likely ask a lot of questions, you know."

"I'll be too mighty sleepy to talk when they get here," Fat Jack replied; "and the worst of it is, my memory is so bad that I'll likely think I dreamt about you fellows, if I think of you at all."

They were now on the beach, and in answer to the captain's signal with a flash-lamp the boat, which had taken them ashore and had gone back to the ship to report to Henderson, now came shorewards once more, and a few moments later the party were sailing out to the *Mota*, Fat Jack talking to them until he could no longer be heard.

"Act the first has been successful, Henderson," the captain said, on reaching the *Mota's* deck. "Here is Vatii, and he doesn't know we're not the men he arranged to meet."

"Your orders then, sir? The Frenchmen must have cut the corners as clean as we did."

"Get through the reef full speed ahead for Fiji. Out with all lights. We've just time to be hull down before daylight."

Next minute the *Mota's* engines were in motion, and the gallant vessel glided out through the reef. "Full speed ahead" then rang out on the engine-room telegraph, and with a bound the *Mota* responded, and shot forward into the darkness towards the east. Up on the hillside a light waved mysteriously. Raymond and Smith knew that the Algerian was waiting to play his part.

CHAPTER VI

The "Mota" sails from Fiji

THE *Mota* was sailing on an island-studded sea. She was now going under natural draught, and her speed had consequently been reduced to twelve knots. Overhead the tropical sun shone brilliantly, causing the foliage-covered islands to appear like gorgeously painted pictures in one great setting of liquid gold. Most of these islands rose to a height of two thousand feet or so, and all were encircled by a shimmering lagoon contained within a coral reef.

The captain and Mr. Hordern were on the bridge. Mr. Melville was leaning over the gunwale, lost in reflection and the enjoyment of a fragrant cigar. Mr. Henderson and Raymond were talking together near the stern, and Vatii was asleep on a coil of ropes beside them. Smith was tormenting the cook; he had grown tired of photographing the unromantic-looking New Scotian chief.

"Yes, Raymond," the chief officer was saying,

The "Mota" sails from Fiji 137

"we have already interfered successfully in the scramble for the New Scotias. The Frenchmen must be feeling a bit sick by this time, but I expect the Germans will now try some card not upon the conference table, and our next piece of work will probably be to spoil their little game. But there is Viti Levu rising from the sea ahead. That is the largest island in the Fijian group, and Suva, the capital, is on its southern shores."

"Are these islands around us now part of the Fijis?" asked Raymond. "I thought I saw some native houses on one we passed an hour ago."

"We have been sailing among the Fijis since early morning, Raymond. There are about two hundred of them, but only perhaps eighty are inhabited. These islands are the most valuable possessions in the Pacific, and could easily support, almost in luxury, the entire population of Britain. I don't know why people in the old country, who are crowded out, don't come and settle on these islands."

"Did Britain get possession of them without trouble? Was there no France or Germany wanting them?"

The chief officer laughed. "Raymond," he said, "the real king of the Fijis, not a petty chief like our sleeping friend here, asked Britain to

take his country, and Britain refused. Afterwards Germany and America came around hunting for colonial expansion grounds, and then our country took the Fijis over to keep these powers out."

"But I never knew Britain was so slow in those matters," persisted Raymond. "Take a map of the world, and a footnote tells you that British possessions are coloured red; then when you study the map you see splashes of red daubed all over it."

"Quite true, my boy. That is chiefly because until recently there were only three nations whose offshoots could live transplanted, and the British quickly beat the other two in the game of annexing the world. Incidentally, that also accounts for what some people are pleased to term Britain's effeteness, and also explains why she has apparently been neglectful in looking after the interests of her colonies."

"You haven't said why, Mr. Henderson?"

"Oh, I forgot. Well, you see, the only other powers who went in for a world-wide empire since the time of the Spaniards and Portuguese were the Dutch and the French, and Britain eventually knocked them both out. When she was undisputed mistress of all the rock-bound birds' resting places, fever swamps, and ice-covered regions, she

The "Mota" sails from Fiji 139

left the work of keeping those places to her already established colonies nearest to them and took a rest. But while she was doing so two other powers had sprung up, Germany and America, and before Britain realized that they could colonize, they had been allowed to earmark some of the places that Britain hadn't yet taken, because she knew that neither the French nor the Dutch could hold them, and there was therefore no special hurry. The result is, as every schoolboy knows, Germany is now a world power too, and will remain so, although she can't colonize at all, and all her possessions have to be kept up by subsidies to fleets and enormous other expenses, which her home people have to bear in taxation. Still, she is a factor in the world, and old Mother Britain, being desirous of a little peace—she has had a hard life, you know—depends upon her daughters Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa, and other less robust ones for doing her work, backing them up with a good-natured growl when the task is beyond them. Our own mission is a result of that policy, and if we can get within reasonable reach of success, you may be sure old Britain will lift us over the rest somehow, even if she has to send along a fleet of *Dreadnoughts*."

"I feel very important in being allowed to be

one of those chosen for our work, but I don't yet know what Captain Murchison's plans are. Of course Smith and I have thought it all out."

"Captain Murchison's plans are probably not greatly different from those the third and you have evolved. He is by no means so peaceably inclined as you youngsters imagine. He is the leader of a forlorn hope, that is all, and if a fight is necessary, or will ensure success, you may depend upon it he'll fight. But we'll hear all the latest news from our own shore agents in Suva. You have an uncle there, I believe?"

"Yes, but I have never seen him. He has been very good to me, though, and it is to him I owe my education, and in fact everything else, for I would have been helpless indeed had he not looked after me since my mother died."

"He was your mother's brother, I presume?"

"Yes; what made you think so?"

"Oh, I happen to know most people of any note in and around Suva, and I can't recollect anyone bearing your name. Of course it is just possible that I don't know everyone, but—I say, Raymond, has it never struck you as curious how you came to be one of us?"

"Often; the very morning Captain Murchison signed me on I was told by my uncle in a letter

The "Mota" sails from Fiji 141

that I would have to make my own way in the world."

"You don't know what he is like, nor anything else about him, I suppose?"

"No, I wouldn't recognize him if I saw him; but I hope to be allowed to call and pay my respects to him before we leave Suva. All I know of him is that he was supposed to be a wealthy sugar planter and a man with great imperial ideas—I mean who thought Britain the one nation on earth."

"I understand," said Mr. Henderson thoughtfully. "Do you know, I have been thinking of late that your uncle is one of those interested in the affair we are trying to pull off, and that there was less accident in your joining us than appears."

"What do you mean, sir? Do you think my uncle has gone over to the French or——?"

"I think your uncle is one of us, and that he arranged with Captain Murchison to offer you the position of purser on this ship. I have detected a slight resemblance in you at times to one of the heads of the people who are employing us, and, well, I think I can guess the rest."

"You surprise me beyond measure; but the captain will be able to tell me if——"

"You must not ask the captain, Raymond. He

knows something about you, I am sure, for he watches your movements in a way that suggests you were specially put under his charge. But it will all come out in time, my boy. I am a nephew of one of the directors of our people myself, but Captain Murchison doesn't know that, and I shouldn't like him to know, because he might feel that I was a sort of spy upon him, whereas I am merely a hostage to fortune put forward by those who are running this game for the government, on behalf of themselves. We must see that the venture does not fail, Raymond, for there is more involved in it than even Captain Murchison or any of us knows."

"I will do everything in my power for the sake of our captain. All his interests in life, apart from this venture, are centred in his old mother, and it is for her sake that he took on this forlorn hope. I will stand by him to the last, no matter what happens."

"And so will I. He is a fine fellow, and is known by every shipping company to be the best skipper in the Pacific; but his bad luck is proverbial, and he couldn't have got command of another ship from anyone under any circumstances but those attending the present trip."

"Then why was he entrusted with this business

The "Mota" sails from Fiji 143

if his bad luck in other things has been so great?"

"Because he is known to be a straight man, and our employers also know he is reduced to desperate straits, and therefore a fit leader of an expedition that depends more upon a daring coup for its success than anything else. But there is the port of Suva at the base of the mountains; the sugar plantations are nearly all round that distant point, on the Rewa River."

"Do you know our object in coming to Fiji, sir? It can't be merely to land the few items of cargo shipped at Sydney and at Noumea."

"No, although that has to cover our real work. In the first instance we will place Vatii, the sleeping beauty there, into safe hands. Then we will get the latest cable advices from Sydney from our own people, and hear what the Frenchmen have done over the islands business. We will also know the actions the Germans are taking, so far as Sydney can inform us, and will take steps accordingly; and if things appear to be ripe for the venture, we will ship all the cargo we can for Noumea, Sydney, and perhaps Auckland in New Zealand, and go back, calling at the New Scotias on the way, under forced draught, and making an attempt to capture the great Chief Tamii perhaps,

and forcing him to ask for Australian protection. But there goes eight bells; I must go and kick up Smith to relieve Hordern."

"Mr. Henderson," the captain called out at this moment, "how do you think that ship coming in from the south affects us? That is the Canadian Australian Liner, and she left Sydney about thirty hours after us, and called only at Brisbane.

"I don't think we need trouble about her, sir; she will probably have the Monday morning papers on board, and we'll likely hear about our rapid clearing for the islands in them. I know her officers intimately, and can easily find out from them if there are any suspicious passengers on board."

Mr. Henderson went below, and Raymond examined the liner coming up at right angles to the *Mota's* course with a powerful pair of glasses. He recognized it at once as a steamer he had seen berthed near the *Mota* in Sydney. She was a fast Canadian mail packet, bound for Vancouver via Fiji, and Honolulu in Hawaii. The thought at once struck him that the Germans might have one or more of their secret agents on board; but he soon discarded the idea when he remembered that Suva was a British port, and that even although the Germans had followed the *Mota*,

The "Mota" sails from Fiji 145

which in itself seemed a foolish idea, they could do nothing, and would only be putting themselves farther away from Sydney, the city they had specially to watch, and from the islands their country was desirous of annexing. He dropped his glasses suddenly and ran up on the bridge.

"Captain," he cried. "The man whose head I split is on board that steamer."

The captain did not appear to be surprised.

"I expected some of them would be here with the first boat," he said quietly, "and I have been planning accordingly."

"But what can one or two Germans do against us in a British port?" Raymond asked in wonder.

"I don't think they imagined we would be here at all," the captain answered. "They have come here to throw off suspicion while they make a desperate move, the same as we did when we struck at France from her own port of Noumea. You'll have some more of that work for which you are justly famous on hand, my boy. You and Smith will have to find out all about their intentions, unless our own agents have been advised from Sydney."

The two ships were now sailing towards the harbour alongside each other, and soon Mr. Henderson exchanged greetings with his brother

officers on the larger vessel by hand signals. Shortly afterwards both vessels heaved to, to await the visit from the port doctor to grant pratique, and as they were now within a cable's length of each other, the officers began a shouted conversation.

"You haven't waited to grow barnacles on your old tub since leaving Sydney," cried one of the mail steamer's officers.

"No," Henderson replied. "We leave the cultivation of barnacles to alleged fast mail steamers, something like what runs at present on the All Red Route."

"Why did you clear out of Sydney without even saying you were going?" another officer asked in a stentorian shout. "There was a report the morning after you left that you weren't coming to Fiji at all."

"Which report, as you may perceive, was incorrect."

"That's a fact. Are you coming over to lunch with us? We sail for Honolulu in five hours, you know."

"Thanks! but there is just a chance we may sail ourselves before five hours have passed. We came along at top speed to get first pick of a big shipment of fruit we were advised would be waiting

The "Mota" sails from Fiji 147

here by this time. We didn't want other traders to get in ahead of us—that's why we left so hurriedly, too."

"Ah, well, here's the doctor coming. See you on shore?"

"Yes, in an hour's time at the Union Jack Club."

The conversation ceased, for the doctor had now reached the mail packet in a steam launch, and the shore agent of the *Mota* had also come up to that steamer's gangway in another.

"Had you a good trip, Captain?" this individual cried on reaching the deck.

"Not bad," was the response. "But we've got in to time, I think?"

"You have. Anything special among your cargo?"

"A native chief of some islands about five hundred odd miles west from here."

The man laughed.

"I suppose you bought him outright as a spec' of your own?" he said.

"Yes; but I had to pay, or promise to pay, half a dozen cheap mirrors, a concertina, an American clock, a box of crackers, and a suit of pyjamas for him, and I expect some of my boys have promised some additions to that list. You see, there was

some competition as to who would have him, and—well, we were the first. Anything fresh here?”

“Not much—there’s a kind of fever broken out over in Levuka; a German gunboat in from Samoa, and bound for Klondike or Tibet its people would like us to believe. They are waiting for some fellows to arrive by that Canadian steamer, our men have found out, and I expect you know more than I do about what that means.”

“I believe I could guess in two tries, at any rate. When does the conference about the islands come off?”

“Oh, it’s postponed again; I don’t think it will ever take place. Of course one government has written nice letters to another, and the ambassadors in London, Paris, and Berlin have gone to tea with each other. Britain has said she doesn’t want the islands. The Kaiser has said that the mailed fist of his august self, assisted, more or less, by Providence, must control the destinies of the South Sea islands north of a certain parallel, and France has said that she can do a little in the mailed-fist line herself, and that certain islands belonged to her before Germany had passed through the stone age, or some equally remote period.”

“Well, the *Mota* has scored first, anyway, for

in Vatii lay the French hope of a peaceful annexation. But the German cruiser worries me. I suppose she is waiting here the arrival of someone who knows the islands in question, and intends to leave shortly?"

"Likely, though no one knows of her intentions."

"Very well, I have two youngsters here that I want our people to guard closely against accidents. They will go on shore casually, and will be watched by some German friends who have arrived by that Canadian steamer. My own men could follow them, but it is most likely that they are too well known to the people whom the boys are to draw after them. You will take Vatii also, when he awakes, and place him where he will be well looked after, as befitting his importance as a man for whom the French have a great admiration. The rest leave to the *Mota* and her men."

"Very well, sir, I understand. Show me your decoys, so that I can point them out to our shore friends. Why, that is only a boy—and, Great Fiji! what is his name?"

"Fairfax—he's our purser; and there is the other, Smith, coming on deck now."

The captain called the two youths forward, and gave them instructions as to their duties on shore;

then, collecting the bills of lading and other papers, Raymond and Smith went ashore with the agent to interview the customs authorities.

The business with the customs officials was soon completed, and then the two started to explore the town, the agent having told them that already he had arranged for trusted men to follow them wherever they went. Smith had been in Suva several times previously, but everything was new to Raymond, and he was greatly interested in the many different peoples he saw in the chief streets. The town itself seemed, if anything, an improvement on Noumea, although wood, and the convenient corrugated iron painted white, formed the walls and roofs of all the buildings. But, unlike hot and dusty Noumea, Suva was not shadeless, graceful palms and orange trees growing wherever a vacant piece of ground provided room for their roots. Everyone seemed prosperous in Suva, and the stores were doing a trade that promised well for the general wealth of the people, of whatever colour or race. Wealthy sugar planters down on business, or for a 'spell', from their plantations on the Rewa River, swaggered along in white flannels and soft broad-brimmed felt hats. These men were as English in speech and manner as those of their

countrymen who dwell in Kent or Devonshire, although Scotland and Ireland perhaps could claim most of them as having been born within their magic domains. Rubbing shoulders with the planter kings were the merchants and traders, all coatless, red-sashed, and broad-hatted. These two parties had their saloons and clubs, entrance to which was impossible to the many other peoples who inhabit Fiji, although open to the white steamer passengers of any nationality. The most noticeable of the other classes who glided quietly along under the verandas that stretched over the footpaths were the coolies, or imported labourers from India and South-eastern Asia. They mostly wore the orthodox dress of the European labourers, but turbans generally graced their heads. The Chinaman was evident everywhere, as were also his smarter and more progressive neighbour, the Japanese. A few Solomon and New Scotian islanders, and an occasional American negro, with a larger number of most handsome and intellectual-looking Tongans, completed the picture of street life in Fiji. The white population seemed to have nothing to do but quench thirst, a fact which made Raymond wonder, for although the islands were nearer the equator than New Caledonia, the climate was much

cooler than in Noumea, which was just inside the tropic of Capricorn, and could even compare with Sydney favourably.

So Raymond thought as Smith and he hunted up the address of his uncle, only to be told by a clerk when they at length located the place that that gentleman had gone over to Sydney a few weeks before to transact some business in connection with vanilla- and rubber-growing.

Raymond was greatly disappointed. Perhaps his uncle was even now looking for him in Sydney, and he wondered if he had not been too impulsive in joining an expedition that to some people might mean nothing short of a filibustering party.

Smith and he turned away, and came face to face with Herr Branstein and Rosenthal. The meeting must have been accidental, for the Germans seemed even more surprised than was Raymond, and the look of recognition that came into the eyes of Rosenthal was such as could not be easily assumed at will. Raymond pulled Smith's arm and made to pass, but Herr Branstein's voice made him pause.

"Surely you are not going to cut old friends like that," it said. "I don't know if you saw me while you were our guest or not, but you must

remember my friend here ; you split his head open with a shutter bar, don't you remember?"

Rosenthal looked as if he would like to return the compliment on the spot ; but evidently he feared Herr Branstein, so he grinned sheepishly, but said nothing.

"I do remember, sir," said Raymond, "and I do not feel in the least sorry. You had no right to shut me up in your house and——"

"My dear boy, I am not reproaching you for anything ; you did quite right in fighting for yourself. That is what we were doing then, and that is my apology for our treatment of you. We made a mistake, and we are very sorry that you were put to any inconvenience over it. We thought you were what you are not—a somewhat foolish secret agent of some power. But my name is Branstein. I am a German, but I am not a bad man for all that. I happen to know your name. Won't you introduce your friend, and let us all go and have lunch together?"

"My name is Smith," put in Raymond's comrade aggressively, "and I'll send a bullet hole through each of you beggars from my trouser pockets sooner than you can wink an eyelid, if you as much as move before you are told to clear out. You can't blarney me, you blamed sauerkrauters."

"You shouldn't be rude, young man," Herr Branstein said reprovingly. "'All is fair in love and war' is, I think, a saying among the English, and we own up to having been wrong. You are most valiant men, however, yet I wonder if you would risk accepting an invitation to lunch with me on board that German cruiser lying out there?"

"With much pleasure," Raymond said quickly.

"Raymond!" interjected Smith, "are you dreaming? They'll close us down in the hold or in the coal bunkers."

"No, we won't do that," Herr Branstein said. "Still, I admit that some people might call you foolish in taking my word that no harm shall come to you, when you have reasons for doubting my honesty."

"Of course, if you are drawing out of the invitation, we won't press you to give it," put in Raymond impulsively. "But I did want to have a look at a German cruiser at close range, all the same."

"Then come along now, it is just lunch time."

The two boys looked round carelessly, and saw several men whom they had previously observed near them lounging about a saloon entrance.

"Thanks!" Raymond said; "we'll come, but

The "Mota" sails from Fiji 155

we must be back here in an hour from now. We have an appointment then."

"You are not going to give your lunch much chance, lads, but let it be as you wish. I will undertake that in one hour's time you will be standing here again."

The quartette walked down to the quay, where they boarded a waiting steam launch manned by a crew of the German navy, and a few minutes later stood on the deck of the cruiser *Heidelberg*. Here Rosenthal sullenly withdrew from the party and went below, but several officers came forward and were introduced by Herr Branstein, who was evidently a person of considerable importance on the cruiser. After being shown round the guns and other parts of the ship usually closed from public inspection, an adjournment was made to the officers' dining saloon, where an excellent lunch was served. Everyone talked English fluently, and discussed the latest cablegrams from Europe in a way that showed a wonderful knowledge of things pertaining to the different countries of that continent. It was all very enjoyable, and the boys would have forgotten all about their appointment on shore had not Herr Branstein suddenly said: "Well, my lads, your time is up. Come and I'll take you

on shore myself. I hope your minds are now disabused of the idea that we Germans are all uncivilized and unprincipled people?"

"Oh, we never thought Germans weren't as good as any other people," Raymond said naively. "It's just their way of going about things that we don't think fair and square."

"That's it, Raymond," cried Smith; "they always hit below the belt."

The officers laughed good-naturedly, and one asked irrelevantly: "Where are you bound for when you leave Suva?"

"I don't know," Smith answered, "but I heard the old man say there was good trade in Switzerland."

"Yes," laughed one, "but the harbours of that country are not easy to enter from the sea. When do you sail?"

"Sometime this afternoon if we can get all the cargo on board."

"I don't think you will get away this afternoon," said Herr Branstein, as the shore-bound party stepped into the launch. "I am going to call round on Captain Murchison in an hour or so to request him to delay his departure until nightfall at least. He is accustomed to leaving ports at night, anyway."

The "Mota" sails from Fiji 157

"Are you the commander of the *Heidelberg*, sir?" asked Raymond, ignoring Herr Branstein's last words.

"No, I am merely attached to her for some special service. I am a member of the diplomatic body, as is also my friend Rosenthal, whom you will remember. The *Heidelberg*, however, is at present at my disposal, and I asked you on board to see her gun power and general fighting abilities, and also to show you that her officers are as smart as those of any British cruiser. But here you are on shore, my boys, as I promised you should be, to time."

The boys and Branstein stepped on to the quay.

"And we thank you, sir——" began Raymond; but Herr Branstein interrupted.

"Don't trouble," he said coldly. "I confess my motives in asking you on board, although quite honourable, were selfish. I meant to find out if you knew anything about a certain matter which need not be discussed, and I have discovered all I wanted to know."

"But we told you nothing," cried Smith. "We couldn't, anyway; and besides, you never asked any questions except when we were to sail and where to."

"No; when you put your trust in me by coming

on board I concluded you knew nothing of any matter, and that the report current in Sydney was an effort of someone's imagination. I have changed my mind again, however, and would like to give you the hint, because I admire bravery in lads, that the *Heidelberg* will sink any ship, trader or otherwise, that she sees where she considers such ships have no business to be."

"Are you ocean policemen," asked Smith, "and if so, who gave you your licence?"

"I was giving you a hint. A German cruiser requires no licence from anyone to protect her own interests; but tell your skipper I am coming round to see him shortly."

"I don't understand riddles," said Smith. "Talk about photography and I'll follow you."

"No, I suppose you are only two simple-minded boys who couldn't do anything wrong if you tried?"

"You've got us to a pencil point," Smith agreed. "We're the new version of the *Innocents Abroad*."

"And yet you are of such importance that your movements are watched by the might of Britain in Fiji, and a war might have been caused by the slightest accident. That fact gave you away to me at once, hence my words to you."

"What are you talking about?" asked Raymond.

The "Mota" sails from Fiji 159

"Only that a few minutes after you came on board the *Heidelberg* the ten-inch guns of that British cruiser lying in the bay were all trained on her. Good-afternoon, my young friends, I hope we do not meet where our interests conflict! Ah! the guns are swinging back to rest again. You are well looked after."

The German turned away with a smile, and the boys stared at the British cruiser. There was no doubt about her action. Her guns had been very much in evidence only a moment or so before, but now they had disappeared.

"It's only gun drill," laughed Smith.

"Which might have developed into gun practice," added Raymond significantly, "and the *Heidelberg* would have been an excellent target."

"Have you tumbled to anything, Raymond? Why did he invite us on board, and what was he driving at later? He can't really know our business; and what are he and that other spy doing in Fiji, anyhow?"

"I think it is all very plain, and from his hints I fancy we'll have to evolve some more schemes by which we can circumvent the Germans. France is out of the running now. But come into the post office with me for a minute; I want to send a note to the captain."

"Can't we go down ourselves? Who can deliver the note otherwise?"

"We are being watched now, most likely, and if we went down to the ship now our German friends might think we have discovered something, and would do something desperate to prevent our leaving port when we wanted. As for a messenger, I see a fellow behind us whom I have spotted near us all day. I am sure he is watching our German shadows, and if so, he will doubtless be able to get a message delivered."

"Go in and write your message and I'll find out about him now," said Smith. "I'll be back in a minute." He turned down the street again and Raymond entered the post office, on the notice board of which was a type-written announcement to the effect that mails would be made up that day for dispatch to New Zealand, Australia, and the East generally by the s.s. *Mota*. Another notice informed all that mails for Canada, U.S. of America, Britain, and Europe would also leave that day per Canadian packet.

Tearing a page from a notebook, Raymond wrote: "Have discovered that the *Heidelberg* is about to sail for the islands, and that steps will be taken to prevent the *M.* leaving port. Two of the spies we know are on board; they seem to be

The "Mota" sails from Fiji 161

necessary in some way, and one will call upon you this afternoon. I don't think they really know, but they strongly suspect the *M*." He had just folded up the missive and placed it in an envelope which he bought at the counter, when Smith came in with the man who had been following them.

"It's all right," he whispered. "He is one of the staff in our agent's office, and he tells me that half Suva is looking after us, and that our agent even notified the commander of the British cruiser that the German might have to be overhauled. The agent is evidently a man of importance here."

"He is," the man said with a smile. "He is deputy for a man who pulls strings behind governments. I'll deliver your letter in person within ten minutes."

Raymond addressed the note and handed it over, and the man walked rapidly away. The two comrades then turned in the opposite direction, but when passing a rather low-class-looking saloon two apparently drunk men reeled out, and in a flash had caught the boys and thrown them inside. Next instant the doors were closed, and the comrades realized that they were trapped, and that one of their captors was Rosenthal, while the other was the German proprietor.

An evil grin was on the former's face. "I vill

gif you vat you vill forget not," he said, presenting a revolver at Raymond's head. "You vill tied be and den taken vere you vill not again get free."

"Get out!" said Smith; "we'll fight the pair of you for it."

But Smith did not get the chance to show his pugilistic powers. The wooden shutters, which served as windows and ventilators when not closed, were suddenly burst inwards, and half a dozen men rushed through the aperture. Rosenthal turned to meet the intruders, only to be hurled violently across the saloon by the first man. He fell with a sickening crash, and his head striking the hard concrete floor, the old wound inflicted by Raymond burst open again. The fat proprietor had received similar treatment from the men, but his rotundity of figure stood him in good stead, and beyond getting his breath squelched out of him he did not suffer.

The boys had at once recognized those who had come to their assistance as Henderson and some of the stokers and crew of the *Mota*, but everything happened so quickly, that the two men were bound helplessly in a corner before either Raymond or Smith had recovered from their surprise at being so speedily rescued by their own people.

The "Mota" sails from Fiji 163

"Get them into a boat and pull along to the *Mota*," Henderson said to the men. "Take care that you are not seen by the officers of the German cruiser, but you needn't mind who sees you here. Everyone not friends will think you are carrying out some comrades who have been drinking too much fire-water."

The men grinned, and propping their prisoners on their feet, they shouldered them across the roadway, and finally deposited them in the bottom of a boat lying at a small wharf. They then pulled off, and Henderson turned to the boys. "Come on," he said; "let us get out of here before any of the secret agents spot us. We don't want to be mixed up in a saloon-breaking case."

"But won't these people the men are taking out to the *Mota* make a big story to their nearest consul about being carried away by force from a British port?" asked Raymond as they walked away.

"No," Henderson answered. "Spies don't cry out when they are caught. They suffer their fate in silence, as we'll have to do if the Germans catch us poaching on their preserves. But you two are wonders for wandering; and why on earth did you go on board that cruiser out there? We thought it was all up then."

"Oh, we knew we were well protected," Raymond

answered, "and we wanted to show how simple and innocent we were. We wanted to know what the fellows who trapped me in Sydney were doing in Suva also, and what connection they had with the cruiser. We found out one or two things, and we have already informed the captain of our discoveries. How did you happen to be on hand so opportunely just now, though?"

"We knew that if any attempt would be made on your person on shore it would be there. That is a well-known German saloon, and sooner or later we knew you would pass it, so we watched from the saloon nearly opposite all day. But we'd better get down to the ship at once. I see Captain Murchison is flying the private signal to return immediately. I expect he wants to get out to sea before the threatened buster comes up from the south and shuts us in here for good. The glass is falling rapidly."

"And will the storm detain the German boat too, if she doesn't get out?"

"It will. She has by no means too much power, and they can't try what the *Calliope* did at Samoa. By Jove! history is repeating itself. Three German and three American war-boats were smashed up that time, and the only British craft watching developments steamed out to sea and safety in the

The "Mota" sails from Fiji 165

teeth of a gale. Of course Britain didn't really want Samoa, but she wished Uncle Sam to be in the running, and by her help he got in, although he had to share with Germany in a kind of way."

"Where are we going when we leave Suva?" Smith asked abruptly. The Samoan affair was well known to him.

"That I do not know," Henderson replied. "The captain didn't know himself half an hour ago."

"Your letter has done the trick, Raymond. We'd better hurry up for fear Herr Branstein is telling fairy tales."

They reached the *Mota* to find her loading cases of fruit in great haste. The wharf alongside which she was now moored was littered with huge crates of oranges, bananas, cocoanuts, and pineapples, and innumerable bags of sugar also lay around. The engineers were overhauling the engines, and the bunkers had been replenished with coal. The *Mota's* deck was higher than the wharf, and the portholes of her saloon were hard against the fruit cases on shore.

The captain was standing on the after-deck talking to Herr Branstein, and coming round a corner a little way off was the boat containing the two prisoners.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Henderson, as he perceived the situation, "this won't do. We must get our German friend below, or the game is up."

He spoke a few words in a low voice to the captain, as Raymond and Smith went up and talked to Herr Branstein.

"Won't you come below and have a look through our alleged wonderful ship, then?" the captain suddenly said. "I can't say I understand altogether what you have been talking about, but I gather that you think we have designs on the German Empire and other places."

"I would like to see through your ship just to satisfy my curiosity," Herr Branstein laughed; "but you have misunderstood me if you thought I was afraid of your powers of doing damage to any part of the German Empire. Excuse me carrying my revolver in my hand, will you? I am a diplomatic agent who is troubled with a heart unusually soft for gentlemen of my profession, and I came here to tell you that you will simply be committing suicide if you take your ship anywhere within the precincts of the islands of New Scotia until the present trouble is settled."

He followed the captain into the saloon, where Raymond joined them.

"But what in thunder could we do among these

uncivilized mudbanks?" asked the captain. "There is little or no trade."

"I am not discussing trade; I am merely making a statement which, if it is meaningless to you, can do no harm; whereas if, as I suspect, it is not without some significance to you, it may save the lives of yourself and your crew."

"Thanks! take a seat. You are not afraid we will run away with you, I suppose?"

"No, I have compelled the authorities here to order your detention as a filibuster, and although it hurts them very much, they will have to use every endeavour to prevent you from leaving the wharf or stand the consequences. And I know that a storm is coming up, against which no ordinary trader could make headway. Again, the moment those ropes, which I can see through the portholes mooring you to the wharf, were cast off, I would shoot you dead, also your youthful friend, which would cause me much regret. Supposing, too, your officers persisted in sailing away into this cyclone after your death, they would also regret doing so very soon. My comrade for the time being, who, perhaps you know, was handled severely by our young friend in Sydney, knows I am here, and he has orders to follow this ship, should she try to sail away, in the *Heidelberg*, and sink her whenever

she gets clear of the port, or as soon after as may be convenient."

"You have everything cut and dried then, sir, I see," the captain said; and Raymond thought he mastered his despair well.

"Everything. Besides, if you are really honest, you will not try to detain me on your ship."

"My dear sir, you are at liberty, and shall always be, to leave this ship at any moment you desire."

"Thank you! I will now put my revolver back in its place. I hear your engines running; testing their power, I suppose? If there is any slack in those mooring-ropes they might be snapped."

"Oh, the boys will watch that! They were overhauling the packing glands of the high-pressure cylinder, or something with a name like that, to-day, and are probably taking a turn or so out of the old organ to see what sort of tune she is in. We'll go round and have a look at them later."

"I don't think there is much fear of either this or our craft desiring to go out to-night. I can feel the swell that precedes the typhoon even now. It's going to be bad outside to-night."

"Oh, I don't think it will worry us much!" laughed the captain strangely. "Mr. Fairfax,

will you kindly go and ask Mr. Henderson to make sure these ropes are all right. If we go away to-night we'll have to take the wharf with us. Tell him, also, to get some of those fruit cases cleared away from the portholes; they are shutting out our light. Tell Mr. Melville, too, to see what his engines can do at once, and stop this racket."

"All right, sir!" Raymond responded. He went on deck and got the greatest surprise he had ever received in his life.

Ten minutes later he re-entered the saloon. "Mr. Henderson has attended to all instructions, sir," he said, "and he told me to tell you there was no fear now. The engineers are also finished."

"Well, I'll go now," announced Herr Branstein. "I think I have said sufficient to show you that Germany will stand no nonsense. Dear me! this storm is going to be very severe. I can hear the inrushing breakers swishing past the sides. See the clouds, too, how they are scudding across the sky! Goodbye!"

"Are you really going?" asked Captain Murchison.

"Yes, I'd better. I must tell Rosenthal that we are not leaving to-night. Why, this ship is heaving even here."

"Of course she is heaving; that's only natural. But I say, it will be rather inconvenient for you to go now. I'll bring your friend to you, and you can come on with us to Auckland. Of course I am not insisting, and if you must leave, why, I suppose you must, and we'll all be very sorry."

"What do you mean, sir?" cried the German, springing to his feet.

"Only that it would be a fairly long swim for you now, and the sharks are very bad round these parts."

"Why, man, we are alongside the wharf. I see it out through the portholes."

"True," said the captain reflectively, "we were ordered not to leave the wharf——"

"Then I am going on shore."

"So we took it with us," continued the captain.

"What!" yelled the German, his face becoming yellow with a horrible fear.

"I got the first one or two planks of the wharf sawn through and strapped tightly to the ship this afternoon, and packed those fruit cases you see through the porthole on them. We've been sailing now for half an hour, and our first stop is Auckland in New Zealand."

Herr Branstein rushed on deck. Suva was just fading over the stern.

CHAPTER VII

The "Mota" reaches her Destination

HERR BRANSTEIN gazed for a moment at the receding shores, over which a curtain of darkness was now beginning to fall, then, throwing himself down upon a crate of bananas, he uttered the word "Fooled!" and smiled in a sickly fashion.

"If you have changed your mind about going ashore," began the captain, "you had better come and get some dinner. Things will be a bit rough presently when we are caught in this buster coming up."

"I don't want dinner, thank you, and I can't help regretting for your own sakes that you have succeeded in tricking me. The cruiser belonging to the country whose servant I am, at present in Suva Harbour, will overhaul you during the night, and I greatly fear your ship will be reported as having gone down in the storm, in the Australian and New Zealand papers, by to-morrow morning at latest."

"Do you know," said the captain musingly, signing to Henderson to join them, "we don't feel much worried about that. We doubt if your

floating gun-carrier can come out against what is before us, and anyway, the officers will not act without orders, because they feel pretty sore at being superseded by two landsmen, even although these happen to be secret agents."

"But they will act under the remaining landman's orders, and he knows I am on board this ship. It may interest you to know, too, that we are not landsmen. We have upheld our country's cause in both services. Rosenthal knows his business, and will quickly bring you to book."

"I shouldn't advise you to depend too much upon that fellow. You see, he made a murderous attack on two of my youngsters this afternoon, and—well, he's got a pretty bad head, and my chief engineer is doctoring him now in one of the cabins."

"Rosenthal on this ship?" shrieked Herr Branstein. "You lie! You are only bluffing."

"My dear sir," answered the captain calmly, "I never lie. I might have been commodore of a fleet by this time if I had been any good at that art. Come and see your friend for yourself. No, you don't!"

Branstein had drawn his revolver, but before he could use it, Henderson and the captain had thrown themselves upon him and wrenched it from his grasp.

"My purser told me," continued the captain, "that he heard you reminding someone that gentlemen of your profession didn't believe in the spirit of revenge."

"You have made a mistake, Captain, in taking that weapon from me; I harbour no revengeful feeling. I have played the game and lost, and that weapon was intended to take my own life. Give it back to me, if you are a gentleman."

The captain looked at the German for some time without speaking. "Come down into the saloon," he finally said; "I want to see your face while we are talking. I will give you your shooter when we have finished saying what we have to say."

"I have nothing to say, sir. Only one thing remains for the man who loses in the kind of game I am playing. Through being foolishly soft-hearted I have placed myself in your hands."

"I don't know what you mean by saying you have lost anything by being in my hands. I am not an unscrupulous villain; I am the commander of a ship carrying His Britannic Majesty's mails at the present moment. You will be treated as well as any passenger has a right to expect, and will be landed at Auckland in four days, unless the typhoon beats us."

The German smiled wearily, but he followed the

captain into the saloon with Henderson and Raymond.

"You needn't begin to tell me, Captain," he said, "that you are not mixed up in the same affair as I am."

"Perhaps you would tell me what affair that is? A poor trader like me is not used to the mysterious ways of government agents, secret or otherwise."

"You know that France is preparing a coup in connection with some islands, and that if Germany cannot discount it she loses?"

"Supposing I do know?"

"Then you must know that you have given me my death warrant, for I represent Germany's interests along with Rosenthal, and another in Sydney. We thought at first you were playing a lone-hand game, but we have since found out that you were escorted between Sydney and Noumea by the French steamer *Polynesian*, and from the fact that you went to Noumea at all we know that you are working to help the French."

"Great powers! man, we went into Noumea with cargo."

"No good, Captain. Who would send cargo with a ship this size and pay freight when a subsidized mail steamer like the *Polynesian* was leav-

ing at the same time, carrying cargo for next to nothing to the same port?"

The captain laughed heartily; it was the first genuine laughter in which Raymond had known him to indulge.

"I don't see the joke," said Herr Branstein gloomily. "Kindly hand me that revolver."

The captain checked his laughter. "Herr Branstein," he said earnestly, "does failure in the matter in which you are engaged really mean death to you?"

"It does, if failure could have been obviated by any effort of man."

"I understand. You fight against men, but you can draw out if a Power higher than man interferes. That is where you have the pull over some poor beggars I know. Have you a mother?"

"No. Only my wife would miss me. My other friends would forget they ever knew me; but she——" Herr Branstein's voice softened, but only for a moment. "I ask nothing," he continued coldly. "People of my profession don't cry out when their time comes. You promised to give me that revolver. I am, at least among gentlemen, entitled to a soldier's death."

"You are not going to die. Listen, Herr Branstein! Had you a mother depending on you, I would have put about and landed you in Suva;

but as failure means death to some others as well as to you, whether fate takes a hand in the game or not, and some of them have mothers, I cannot do that, because it would ruin all hopes. But we are not in French employment, and it is for reasons quite different from what you think that we are anxious to make good time to our next port. We knew you would follow in your cruiser, so we took you with us; but now we are going to show you that we can play the game too, for the sake of the one lady who would miss you. Mr. Henderson, put the ship about and set a course for Levuka. We will land this gentleman at that town, where he can either cable across to his ship to come for him, or cross himself to Suva in a launch—the distance is just enough to occupy the night on the journey.”

The chief officer saluted and left the saloon, and soon after the rattling of the steering-gear showed that the *Mota* was being swung round.

Herr Branstein, when he realized that he was to be put on shore at the only other town of importance in the Fiji islands from which he could easily get into communication with the *Heidelberg*, almost broke down. Secret agents do not usually receive any consideration. He tried to utter some words of gratitude, but the captain stopped him.

“Herr Branstein,” he said kindly, “we are both men, and although fate has made you an agent of a powerful government and me a poor unfortunate trader of no account, and made us both pawns in a game more subtle than appears, we can play that game squarely, and need bear no personal feelings but goodwill towards each other. You have a wife; I have a mother. You will be landed at Levuka to-night, so let us say no more about affairs which concern us otherwise than as men. Dinner is ready.”

The two men grasped hands, then the captain gave a sign to the steward, and the dinner gong was sounded.

At midnight the German was put ashore at Levuka, the one-time capital of Fiji, after which the *Mota* steamed for the open sea again, still carrying the other two prisoners. The part of the wharf and the fruit crates taken from Suva had long since been cut away, and the storm had been left behind when the course had been altered.

After getting clear of the coral reef which surrounds Vanua Levu, the island on which stands Levuka, the captain held a council with the officers and engineers, at which it was decided to abandon their former plan of making Auckland in New Zealand their port of destination, Noumea now being fixed upon instead.

"I think it wise to go back and see the Frenchmen," Mr. Melville said. "We know now that if we operated from New Zealand, as we intended to do, we might carry our point; but seeing we are now aware of the German idea of seizing the islands and risking a fight to hold them, our business should be to play the French against them, and while they are watching each other, slide in ourselves and do the trick. The French steamer can take on our mails from Noumea, and we'll be able to get up among the islands before either of the other parties."

"You talk to the point, Melville," the captain agreed. "The Germans mean to capture Kalii and force him to ask for their protection, as the French hoped Vatii would do with them. We thought we should simply repeat our last dodge and carry Kalii away somewhere out of the road, but there are signs that that might not be so simple a task as was the last, so it seems to me that it would be good strategy on our part if we could get the French to block the Germans' game."

"Another reason for making for Noumea instead of Auckland," put in Hordern, "is that I don't think we could negotiate that typhoon we've left to the southward. I have been on the bridge most of the time, and I may tell you the *Mota* felt it, and

we had only broken on the outer edge of the disturbance when we turned."

"You are right," said Henderson. "I wouldn't bet on the chances of the German cruiser seeing daylight if she tackles it after us, or for any other reason."

"Noumea it is then," announced the captain. "Mr. Henderson, set a course so as to go round the southern end of New Caledonia. That should just take us along the outside fringe of a typhoon working around the Tongans, Fijis, and Loyalties, such as I expect this one is doing."

"May I speak, sir?" asked Smith. The bridge had temporarily been left in charge of a quartermaster, hence the presence of all the officers.

"Certainly, my boy," replied the captain. "Scripture tells us that out of the mouths of babes wisdom cometh forth, sometimes."

"All I wanted to say is that it is lucky for us and bad for the Germans that you have a soft heart, sir. I was looking back at Suva to-night, at sundown, and the last I saw of it was a cloud of fiery smoke, and I knew that the German cruiser had come out after us, or else the British ship had received some sudden order, which is unlikely. I hope the officers have had a good upbringing, for I don't expect the *Heidelberg* will weather the typhoon we

were running into when we turned, and anyhow, Herr Branstein will not see her for some time, even if she goes through, and by that time we can have the French Johnnies on the warpath."

The chief officer had now set a course west by south, and feeling that everything had been done to ensure success that men could do, all not on duty retired to rest. Raymond had already bartered with one of the crew for a native Fijian war-drum, much to that person's surprise. He could not understand the sudden desire of the purser for such an article.

Towards evening on the third day the *Mota* once again sailed through the great reef gap and entered the harbour of Noumea, flying signals that brought the military and naval officials of the colony out to her almost before she had dropped anchor.

As a result, the two fastest cruisers in port were ordered to get ready to put to sea at once, and the officers of the *Mota* were invited to attend a hastily arranged banquet on shore that evening. The Port Commander would have liked to make it later, so as to allow of more elaborate preparations, but Captain Murchison explained that he was already overdue and could not delay, much as he would like to do so.

It was a novel sensation to Raymond to be

dining alongside of, and chatting freely to, the men whom he had overheard discussing the arrangements for annexing the New Scotian islands only eight days before, and who as yet did not know that Vatii was not on board the *Seine* somewhere between the islands and Noumea. But the Frenchmen were good entertainers, and in a way the guests enjoyed themselves, although they felt very mean at accepting the hospitality of men whom they were only pretending to help, and with whom they were at war as much as with the Germans. But they knew they could not refuse to accept the honour done them without risk of arousing suspicion, and they consoled themselves with the fact that, after all, the parties were playing for themselves in a game which would not admit of any advantage being thrown away by either side if they hoped to win. The band played English airs, and for the time all were as light-hearted as though colonial expansion were a matter of indifference. Each side kept its secrets well. A sterner state of affairs would begin on the morrow.

"But you should all be drowned," said the Port Commander to Captain Murchison during a lull in the general conversation. "We had a cable from Auckland this day from some of our friends in that ceety. It say German cruiser come in from Fiji

and report trade steamer *Mota* gone down in typhoon. She herself is one big wreck—all her guns had to be thrown overboard, masts carried away, and funnels at de bottom of de sea. She go right through de heart of typhoon.”

“But we didn’t,” laughed the captain. “We came round the edge of the disturbance; it was one of these island cyclones, you know, not quite a typhoon.”

“Ha, ha! you Inglis call him other names. Vat you say, call a spade the reap machine. All so vair clevaire. But another cable came from Sydney which say that other German cruiser leave there, and that still another have leave Astrolabe in New Guinea. We know vat that means. France will be there before them, and they will look vat you say, sold twice.”

“I hope so,” the captain said. “It looks as if all the ships of war in the Pacific are going to have a corroboree up among the islands—and, by my lost ticket!” he mused to himself, “it is only fair that we, the real Australians, should play a big part in it.”

It was very late when the banquet was over, but the captain was in high spirits when he once more stood on his own ship. “We’ve got our chance now, lads,” he said, as he smoked a cigar with his

officers before retiring. "The French no longer suspect us of being in this island stealing game on our own account, and the Germans will think we are the foundation on which new coral reefs may yet be built. Of course, Branstein will join the *Heidelberg* at Auckland, unless she goes back to meet the Union Company's steamer which was due to leave Suva the day after us, and on which he'll likely be a passenger. She would delay, of course, to allow the force of the cyclone to be spent. Then the cruiser which sighted us being escorted by the *Polynesian* will be near the islands now, and another one is racing over from New Guinea. Against them are these two French cruisers, and likely the *Seine* will also put in an appearance. And while they are barking at each other, each afraid to make a move, we'll sail in by some back door and pay a visit to Kalii, and the rest is in our hands."

The captain's enthusiasm infected everyone, and it was with high hopes that the *Mota's* people slept that night. Next morning Raymond presented the war-drum he had procured to the customs officer who had asked him to obtain one for him. Smith bought an extra supply of films for his camera, and Henderson purchased a stock of mirrors, coloured cloth, glass beads, and other

articles which he calculated might prove useful before the *Mota* touched at another port.

In the afternoon they sailed, this time without any opposition, and leaving Rosenthal and his fat comrade to tell their story, if they liked, on shore. They made good time across the big lagoon, and continued on an easterly course until they knew they were out of sight of the port officials. The two cruisers had sailed some hours before, and were now hull down on the southern horizon; but Captain Murchison intended to take a course round the northern end of New Caledonia this time, and so did not pay any attention to them beyond estimating their powers of speed for future use. When the *Mota* was a safe distance on the Sydney route, she was swung round and headed to the north. Her forced-draught system was put into working order, and like a torpedo-boat destroyer she raced through the sea, her hull trembling from stem to stern from the effects of the increased pressure on her boilers.

When night fell, the captain and Henderson were poring over their charts, and signified that they would be too much engrossed to attend dinner that evening.

"I know what they are doing," Smith said to Raymond. "They are working out the spot where the old man left one of his ships. He found a

gap in the big reef round the chief island, but it wasn't just big enough for him to get through, and I'll bet my camera they mean the *Mota* to go through this time."

And Smith was right, as was proved the next evening when the *Mota* ran up under the lea of a large island whose mountainous slopes pierced the clouds, and whose line of fire-belching summits lit up the surrounding ocean with a weird reddish glare. A long reef stretched away into the darkness, encircling the great mass of land as if to guard it from the rollers of the Pacific. These broke on the coral band and hurled themselves high into the air in snow-white clouds of spray, apparently forming a wall of foam through which it would be a brave man indeed who would try to pass.

But the *Mota* was going to make the attempt. The captain went on the bridge with Mr. Henderson, and Mr. Hordern went forward to the forecastle head. Down in the engine room Mr. Melville himself stood by his engines. This was the chief island of the group, the home of the dreaded cannibal chief Tamii, and the lesser but still warlike Kalii. On the eastern side of the island was the only gap charted in the surrounding reef, and on that little gap the officers of the *Mota* knew that already several ships of war were fast converging.

"Half speed," rang the engine-room bell, as the *Mota* charged at the booming wall of surf which rose ahead. No opening was as yet visible, but Captain Murchison's hand as he held the steering-wheel was as steady as though he were navigating the waters of a large inland lake. The *Mota* slowed down but kept on her course. A timid man would have stopped, and trusted to the momentum of the vessel to carry her through the surf-flanked portals that now were discernible in the phosphorescent wall, but Captain Murchison knew that that policy would end all their hopes, as the currents flowing through the gap would catch the helplessly drifting vessel and throw her high upon the reef. Even at the risk of having the *Mota's* hull ripped open by the sharp jutting points, he knew he must keep steering-way on the vessel, and he intended to do so by taking her through at half speed.

"Starboard!" yelled Hordern from the fore-castle, as the thunder of the surf drowned out all other sounds.

The captain swung the wheel round slightly. He had seen the outjutting crag as soon as had Hordern, and next moment they were into the heart of the boiling foam. It fell over the *Mota's* decks, and blinded all with its salt spray. Every

man, excepting the chief engineer and three firemen, was on deck, and for a short space not one drew a breath. Then suddenly the glistening, thundering ocean barricade was behind them, and the *Mota* was riding on smooth water, which stretched unbroken to the base of the dense forest-clad slopes which rose almost sheer from the coral inlaid beach.

"Full speed ahead!" rang the engine-room bell, and the *Mota* leaped forward instantly.

"I think we may safely have dinner," the captain said to his chief officer. "We are in for whatever is our fate now, and we may as well meet it in as good condition as possible."

"I have an idea that fate is going to be kind to us," Mr. Henderson responded hopefully. "We have had wonderful luck so far, and by proving the practicability of this passage we have opened up a means of being able to strike a blow for Australia, and get away again at will, without being seen."

"Three cheers for Australia!" cried Smith. "She'll pull old Britain through yet."

"Thanks, Smith!" said the captain coldly. "On this ship we do not recognize any difference between parts of the same empire. We are all British to the backbone, even although some of you youngsters have never seen that little strip

of country on the other side of the Bay of Biscay. You will take charge of the ship now until dinner is over. Run for that headland on the starboard, but keep well off, and report to me, if I am not here, when you are abreast."

The captain and the senior officers went below, where Mr. Melville joined them. The ship was now sailing in a deep, smooth lagoon, about ten miles wide from reef to mainland, and for the time the nervous tension at which the entire ship's company had existed since nightfall relaxed. At dinner the captain explained his plans and invited discussion.

"I know of a bay just round the headland in front," he said, "and at its head is a small channel leading in through the belt of alluvial country to a freshwater lake."

"I know it too," put in Hordern. "I thought of starting a vanilla plantation there, but I didn't know if it was fresh water."

"No, Hordern, and perhaps that is why it is I who have command of this expedition and not you. We both know these islands better than any other people. We have both lost ships on the reef back there through trying to do what we weren't paid to do. In short, Hordern, we are two of the unluckiest beggars who ever handled a sextant."

"Have been, sir," Hordern corrected cheerily. "Our luck has changed now. But you were going to say something about my ignorance of the inside lake consisting of fresh water?" Hordern smiled serenely. He did not mind the captain having any credit there might be in the discovery—if there were any.

"Oh, yes!" continued the captain, "I meant that if you had known the lake was fresh water you would have found out all the rest, and therefore known the little matter which caused the agents in Sydney to entrust this job to me. I found the lake was fresh, because I couldn't understand how there could be a current flowing out to the lagoon through the little channel, otherwise; and when I had settled that point, I wanted to know how there could be fresh water on sea level unless it came from somewhere inland."

"But it couldn't do that, Captain. The mountains shut in the lake on three sides and the sea formed the fourth."

"So it seemed; but I discovered that there was a narrow gap in the mountains, a sort of split in the rocks, as if they had been wedged apart by some terrific power, and water deep enough to float a *Dreadnought* filled the bottom, but wide enough for nothing of greater beam than the *Mota*. The

entrance, too, was all overgrown with vegetation, which stretched between the palms on both sides of the gap in great spider-web masses, and at the other end, about six miles into the heart of the mountains, it terminated in a sheer wall hundreds of feet in height, over which fell a mighty column of water which, I am quite sure, must be one of the highest in the world. At any rate, no gunboat can follow us up that ravine, and I venture to say that when we get up to the end I'll find a hidingplace for the *Mota* which neither Germans nor French will discover."

"And then for a man-hunting game on shore?" said Hordern gleefully. "Or do you mean to allow some of the other people to find the man and then steal him from them?"

"I didn't think of that," the captain answered. "There may be something in your idea; we can discuss it. Hallo! there's a message from Smith."

A quartermaster entered the saloon and said: "Mr. Smith told me to say, sir, that we are now abreast of the headland, and he wishes further orders."

"Oh, tell him I will relieve him myself!" the captain replied, rising and following him on deck. The party continued to discuss schemes by which they might outwit their powerful rivals, and Ray-

mond smiled to himself. Smith and he had already thought of all the plans proposed.

The captain had now swung the *Mota* round, and soon they were nearing the densely timbered shore behind which, about a mile inland, the dark, gloomy mountains rose, capped by twin peaks that every few minutes cast great columns of fire into the clouds. It looked as if the captain intended to run the vessel on the beach, but everyone knew otherwise, and all the crew had assembled in the forward well of the ship to watch developments.

And just then the moon showed itself above the mountain ridges, shedding a lustre over the tree-tops that blended with most weird effect with the glow from the volcanic peaks. The *Mota* still headed shorewards at half speed, and as the land began to stand out more distinctly, and objects came into closer view, it was seen that there was a break in the timbers through which a river or channel led inland. Soon the noble little steamer was threading this passage-way, but so strong was the current flowing against her that, to make head-way, her engines had to run at full speed. The thick impenetrable bush which flanked the channel towered above the *Mota's* masts, and in parts scraped her sides, so narrow was the track. Birds and beasts, aroused from their sleep by the noisy

smoking intruder, shrieked and growled as the steamer passed, and some amphibious denizens of the banks even came out to try conclusions with the propeller. They only suffered in that encounter, however, and leaving a wake of turbulent foam, and shedding two great waves from her bows, which washed through and over the crackling brushwood on the low-lying banks, the little steamer churned her way forward, and at length emerged on a large lake which seemed to be closed in by precipitous walls of rock on all sides excepting that by which the *Mota* had approached.

But everyone now knew that the captain could take the ship through these great dark barriers, and, being out of the current, the *Mota* headed swiftly across the lake to a point midway between the two fiery peaks which glimmered far overhead. No gap was visible this time as the *Mota* neared the opposite shore; instead, a great mass of floating vegetation, mingling with the long tendrils of hardy creepers which found root on the rocks, could be seen to stretch right round their base, and it was only what all expected when the captain rang down "stop", and then ordered the anchor to be dropped. As the *Mota* came to rest, and a silence unbroken, save for the occasional distant rumbling of the fire-belching mountains,

reigned over all, the captain addressed the crew from the bridge.

"We are going into the heart of those mountains, lads," he said. "There is a passage straight ahead which I believe the *Mota* can navigate. That passage, however, must be forced, and after that there lie dangers of many kinds into which I have no right to take men without their knowledge and full consent. You all know what we are here for, and have already agreed to take all necessary risks to bring about the success of our work; but there may be some among you who do not think the methods I am about to adopt necessary, and who possibly have ideas of their own as to how one should proceed. If so, let them speak now, and they shall receive every attention—one man's opinion, when it comes to risking his life, being as valuable as any other's, even though the other should be in command."

A cheer interrupted him, and cries of "Good old skipper!" and "We're with you to the end," echoed and re-echoed over the water and among the mountains. "I want to say a word, sir," cried a fireman when the noise died away, "but it won't take long to say it."

"Fire away then, Saunders," said the captain; and the second engineer growled, and made his

way forward among the men. He didn't mean to have any "croakers" in the department he managed under Mr. Melville.

But the man was not "croaking", as everyone soon discovered.

"I want to say, Captain," Saunders spoke, "that we men have often talked over this business among ourselves, and I have been asked to speak for them and say that we'll go with you to seize Berlin, or Paris, or the North Pole, and we don't care a Chinese pigtail whether we have to pass through Jimmy Squarefoot's country on the way, so long as you boss the show. Set the *Mota's* head against those mountains, if you like, and ring down 'full speed'. Every man on board among the crew is with you."

"Hear, hear!" roared the men enthusiastically.

"And every man in the engine room will leave his bones beside you, Captain, if need be," cried the second engineer.

"And I'll punch the ticket—the head, I mean—of any officer who——" Hordern began, but suddenly remembering that there were only Henderson, Smith, Raymond, and himself who had not been covered by the two statements already made he stopped and lit a cigarette. The officers needed no one to say that they were loyal.

"Then, gentlemen," cried the captain, "we'll go on as we have begun. I thank you all for the sentiments you have expressed, and hope that when this affair is settled we shall not have reason to regret anything. Unship the masts."

This would have been a strange order on an ordinary ship, but the *Mota* was not altogether the common ship she looked, and her masts were designed to hinge down when required, one forward over the bows like an elongated bowsprit, and the other over the stern. With a will the crew sprang to their work, and while they prepared to lower the masts to a horizontal position, the engineers themselves also hinged back the funnel and began to remove all projecting davits.

"Now then, lads, get under cover in some way," the captain cried, when everything was ready an hour or two later; "we're going to charge that leafy screen ahead." He rang down "full speed", and next minute the *Mota*, with smoke pouring from the hole in her deck where the funnel had been, was moving towards the unbroken shore-line, gathering momentum with each revolution of her propeller.

The captain had calculated well, but probably he had also caught some signs of the water passage not visible to those who did not know where to look for it. The *Mota* literally threw herself upon

the knotted screen of wild vines and other entanglements, and burst into its heart. For a moment it seemed as if the network would prove too much for the vessel, and while the propeller churned the water into boiling foam, the vegetation flung its long waving limbs around her and held tightly, as if endowed with an instinct to strangle anything that came within its grasp. The *Mota* fought bravely and strained against the creaking, crackling, and snapping barrier, and in a moment her decks were littered with long fibrous roots, twigs, and leaves, while the startled cries of the many birds, thus rudely disturbed, joined with the roar of high-pressed steam and the shouts of the men to complete a pandemonium the like of which Raymond, at least, had never before heard.

Suddenly the *Mota* glided back into the lake again. The captain had telegraphed "astern".

"I am a bit afraid of setting fire to that stuff," he said to Henderson, as he prepared to recharge the springy mass.

"Can she do it?" shouted Melville from the engine-room entrance. "I've got every ounce of steam on that she'll carry."

"I think so," the captain replied grimly, lying down behind the shelter of the bridge rails. "Let her go again."

And go she did. Deftly the captain steered, gripping the wheel by the lower part, and like a thing of life the gallant little steamer flung herself once more into the breach.

"Talk of battering-rams!" muttered Hordern, as he crouched behind the saloon skylights. "Why, if that wall had been solid instead of springy, we'd have gone through like an electric car going through a crowd."

"But we're gaining this time," cried Raymond. "I hear the tendrils bursting apart, and look! there is the moonlight beyond."

"Good old *Mota*!" shouted Smith; and a mighty cheer arose from the men on the well deck as he spoke. The *Mota* was through.

"Stop", rang the telegraph bell, as the lattice-work sprang back into place behind the ship; and as the *Mota* came to a rest, as if to recover herself, the blockade runners looked around to see the nature of the place into which they had so forcibly broken.

Few could suppress a cry of surprise. They were floating between two walls of rock that seemed to have been wrenched apart by some mighty agency. They rose sheer to such an enormous height, that on looking to the top the perspective caused them to appear as if they had

almost closed in overhead. Through this narrow opening the setting moon shone faintly, but its light did not reach the sullen waters upon which the *Mota* was now resting.

"By Jupiter!" said Melville, coming on deck, "this is the funniest canal I ever saw. We'll have no room to pass if we meet another ship coming down. Why, we are scarcely clearing ourselves."

"And therefore nothing of which we need be afraid can come up after us," returned the captain. "We've six miles of this cañon to negotiate, and then the *Mota* has done all that she can do for us. Go ahead slowly, Mr. Melville; and you might send one of your engineers to rig up a searchlight in the bows. I need not tell you that we are in uncharted waters, although it is not the question of depth that troubles me."

The searchlight was soon fixed and the funnel put back into place, then slowly the *Mota* resumed her journey between those stupendous walls of rock.

Two hours later a terrific noise suddenly burst upon the ears of the daring navigators, which, quickly swelling into a roar as if the heavens were rending themselves with thunderbolts, completely drowned all other sounds. Raymond thought the

rocks were falling in on them, and that his companions also thought something of a like nature was evident from their blanched faces.

The captain still stood at the steering-wheel, however, with eyes fixed ahead and apparently indifferent to the earth-shaking thunders, and next moment the others saw the cause of the mighty noise. The rocks suddenly widened out into a cup-shaped formation, into which the *Mota* sailed, and straight in front was a solid vertical sheet of water, which seemed to throw itself from the top of the closed end of the cañon. It was a wonderful sight. In one graceful curve it fell, sullen and unbroken, and from the basin which received it arose a blinding cloud of spray. To talk was impossible. All stood aghast, drenched and helpless, and watched the captain steering right into the spray. Next moment the world was cut away from them. The *Mota* was behind the falls, and the awful noise had become dulled so much that they could even hear each other talk.

"Stop", rang the engine-room bell; then the captain turned to his comrades. "Gentlemen, we have arrived," he said. "Mr. Hordern, put out that light; it is morning."

CHAPTER VIII

The Only Hope

THE men looked around in silent astonishment. Never in his wildest dreams had one of them conjured up such a place. High walls of dripping rocks shut them in on three sides, while on the fourth, and overhead too, was that tremendous ever-moving yet apparently motionless curtain of water. They were completely shut off from the world, and it seemed highly incongruous to see the steam still hanging round the safety-valve outlet of a modern steamer, and still more so for them to believe that they were actually on board that steamer, and alive and well. A dim, yellowish light pervaded the great prison, which flickered constantly and rapidly as if it were produced through the medium of a bioscope in action. This effect, of course, all knew was caused by the falling water, which acted as a semi-transparent screen, and which now, when they looked at it, seemed to be ascending from the basin to the circling roof instead of obeying the natural laws which govern

The Only Hope

201

bodies heavier than air. But this was only another optical illusion, as those who watched the phenomenon were well aware. The deafening noise had now become a dull, distant, droning sound, and it rang in their ears like a strange melody from dreamland.

Smith's voice broke in abruptly on each man's musing. "It's a bit below the belt this," he said sorrowfully. "No one will believe our yarn of this little rain-spout, and I can't photograph it in this light——"

"Never mind trying to photograph it," the captain interrupted. Then, addressing the others he said: "Well, my lads, what do you think of our hidingplace?"

"As a hidingplace it is A1," answered Melville. "But what is the good of it? We can't get out even although we could fly, and how can we get that fellow Kalii into our hands waiting here, unless he obliges by falling down through that sweeping arch of H_2O from the top?"

"I suppose you engineers couldn't freeze that into a glacier?" Hordern asked. "We could then cut stairs in it and climb to the top."

"Oh, get out, Hordern!" cried Smith. "Why not rather float up on the spray outside?"

"I'll pitch you up part of the way if you give

any cheek," Hordern returned, "and the coming-down part won't be agreeable."

"What have you to say, Fairfax?" the captain asked.

"Nothing, sir, except that I am ready to follow out any commands of yours."

"He speaks for me too, sir," said Henderson quietly.

"He speaks for us all, sir," put in Melville. "You have some plan, I know, so give your orders, and the officers and crew of this ship will carry them through."

"Hear, hear!" cried the stokers and sailors in unison, and their spokesman added: "I believe I could shin that face of rock, sir, if it would be of any good."

"Impossible!" the captain replied; "but you'll all have a very difficult piece of work to do, all the same. Come up on this deck, men; we have now reached the stage when sea discipline must give place to a closer relationship, for from now until we achieve our end, or fail miserably, we must all work together, comrades in a desperate enterprise which will need all our combined skill and ingenuity."

While at sea Captain Murchison was a martinet, but well he knew how to handle men. He had

picked his crew from members of that great "legion that never was listed", and who were fit men to take part in a forlorn hope, as he himself was. He knew they would stand by him now, and it was shoulder to shoulder he expected officers and men would have to face all dangers, whether from Frenchmen, Germans, or natives.

The entire ship's company gathered round him, ready to attempt anything he might propose.

"Gentlemen," he cried, "we are now in the heart of the chief island of the New Scotian group, and within a few miles of Kalii's village. We are going to capture him and bring him on board this steamer. Probably we will meet with opposition from a German party bent on a similar mission, and if there is no way out of it we may have to fight them. Certainly we cannot allow Kalii to fall into their hands, or our chances are gone. By coming through the gap not known to others, and then making our way up here, we have got in before any other party possibly could by going through the known break in the outer reef on the other side of the island, and then sending a shore expedition right across to Kalii's village. So far we have been fortunate, and perhaps our luck may continue. But there is still another factor in this game: the dreaded cannibal chief Tamii can, if he

gets to hear of the presence of strangers, wipe us all out without any trouble. Kalii's people have been partly civilized by the missionaries, and there is a road from their village to the coast, but Tamii has never been visited in his mountain home by white men."

"You seem to know a great deal of these islands, sir," said the chief officer, when the captain concluded.

"I ought to. I have been among them often enough."

"Then tell us the next part of the programme," cried Hordern, "and I'll get the tickets punched."

"The next part is to transport ourselves up that rock with arms and stores and then steer a course for Kalii's village. The *Mota* can take care of herself after being moored alongside that ledge."

"But how are we to get out on top, even supposing we can invent means of scaling that cliff?" the chief engineer enquired, puzzled greatly to account for the captain's apparent neglect of the fact that the scaling of the sheer wall of rock seemed impossible.

"That I only know in part," the captain answered. "Look up the face at that hole about sixty feet from the base. That is a cave or passage which leads to the outside world somewhere."

"Shade of Columbus! Captain," cried Horder, "how do you know? Were you up there?"

"No; but the last I saw of my dearest comrade was his being hurled from that cave's entrance by a crowd of frenzied devil-worshippers, who must have come from the outer world."

"But won't they come again and repeat the process with us?" asked one of the men with a laugh. "'Cos it might be better to bombard them with the little pop-guns we've got stowed away in the forward hold, if we could draw them out, before we tackled the climb."

"We need not fear trouble in that direction until the night of the full moon. This is a place where some cannibalistic tribes meet to offer living sacrifices to their demons, I have learned from some natives. The priests throw them from that cave up there. If we are not away from here by that time, I fear it will be because we have failed in our main object. But let us get the ship moored safely, and we'll make the attempt."

"How in creation did your friend get up there?" asked Melville, still seeking in his mind for a means of accomplishing the feat.

"I don't know. He was the most daring man who ever lived, and one of the truest hearted. He was a Scotsman who had wandered all over the

world without any definite object in view. I met him first in Singapore, next in Buenos Ayres, and finally in Sydney about three years ago. There he proposed that we should go trading together among the islands, and I agreed at once. He then bought a little steamer and manned it, and we set out. We did a very successful trade, and were returning to Sydney when we discovered the gap in the reef we came through to-day, and also the inlet and the freshwater lake. Leaving the ship, we went exploring in one of the small boats with two of our men. We found the hidden passage we burst through some hours ago and pulled up here, and almost as soon as the awful noise of the waterfall broke upon our ears, our boat was caught in the whirlpool and, despite our united efforts, drawn under it. Luckily, being on the outer edge of the seething vortex, we were carried round in the widest circle, and so passed through the rising spray instead of under the fall, and to our amazement suddenly found ourselves where we are just now. We landed on that ledge down there and went exploring around to see if there were any signs of the place being ever visited by natives, for we knew we were in the heart of a country inhabited by fierce cannibals, and expected that a spot such as we had discovered would be known to them and

used in their religious or demoniacal rites. Suddenly a shout made me look round, and I saw my comrade standing in that cave up there, and at the same moment one of the men came upon a heap of human bones on that ledge. 'How did you get up?' I shouted; but before he could reply a howling mob of savages rushed upon him from the cave, and next moment a body was hurled down. It struck that ledge head first and toppled over into the water. I was too sick to move for a moment, but when I saw one of my men fall into the water, pierced by an arrow shot from the cave, I drew my revolver and emptied it among the fiends above. But they didn't seem to mind, and a stone flung down striking me on the head, I lost consciousness, recovering some time after to find myself in our boat drifting rapidly down the gloomy cañon we came up to-day. My remaining man was lying dead in the bows. Evidently he had thrown me into the boat and pushed off, only to be struck down himself from above by a poisoned arrow.

"What could I do? I reached the ship, but my men refused to venture up the ravine, and insisted on being taken to Sydney. I shipped a fresh crew there, and came back by the main gap and visited Kalii and his people. They were now Christian-

ized, and living peacefully under the spiritual guidance of a German missionary. They knew of this great fall, and told me that Tamii's people came to it at full moon to offer sacrifices. I went back to Sydney and sold the ship, sending the proceeds to my comrade's relatives in Scotland. Our present agents then offered me the command of a new trader they had just brought out from Britain, and I ran her on that gap out there on the first trip. I couldn't keep away from these islands. From that time until about a month ago my life was that of a skipper of use only to people who make a profession of wrecking old hulks for their insurance money, but I kept my sheet clean somehow. My old mother couldn't have lived if she had thought her son was one of those parasites. You know the rest, gentlemen. The New Scotian trouble had been brewing for some time, and one day the chairman of our people's directors met me in the street, and after some talk about my New Scotian knowledge and my desperate position, gave me the *Mota* for our present work. I got the masts arranged so that they would hinge, not only for running through vegetation screens, but for a purpose which you will soon see. Are you still with me?"

"To the end, whatever it may be," Mr. Melville said, and all the others signified that such were

also their sentiments. And this matter settled, all partook of a hastily prepared meal.

Meanwhile the chief officer, who apparently had been previously acquainted with the captain's history, had already attended to certain duties. He had quietly given orders while the captain had been talking, and now the *Mota* was safely moored with bow and stern lines fastened to jutting crags on the two sides of the basin. He now caused an assortment of stores to be brought on deck, and a quantity of rifles, revolvers, and knives. He signed to the captain when all was ready, and the latter then said: "Gentlemen, one reason why our masts are hinged like the swinging arm of a crane is that we might be able to bridge the distance between the water and that cave. I calculate that the foremast will just do it. Lay her into position, Mr. Melville, when your men are ready, and the sailors will do the rest."

After the meal was over, the engineers lifted the foremast and swung it out until its top rested upon the floor of the cave entrance, and almost before it was in position the man Saunders had run up it like a squirrel and jumped off into the cave. He was quickly followed by several other members of the crew, and soon a rope was dangling down. The stores and weapons were then

bundled into slings and pulled to the cave, and when everything was aloft the mast was slewed back from the wall, and those who had been attending to the work below were pulled up by the ropes. In a remarkably short space of time the entire ship's company stood in the long dark tunnel which stretched away into the mountains farther than anyone knew. The engineers soon evolved a method of making the rope fast, after which it was drawn up and hidden in a small recess in the walls.

The party then armed themselves, and taking up the stores among them proceeded into the tunnel, the captain and his officers leading with revolvers and lights in hand. The passage had evidently at one time been filled with a limestone formation which the trickling waters of perhaps many centuries had carried away or dissolved. It led upwards in a fairly straight line, and offered but little opposition to their progress, except some pools of ice-cold water which lay at the base of small precipices where the tunnel expanded for the time into large caverns. Thus, swimming those pools and climbing over the slippery rocks, they advanced, and ultimately emerged into the light of a late afternoon sun on the banks of a fairly large stream which, when in torrent, would flood

The Only Hope

211

the tunnel. The time had passed more quickly than they had thought.

The captain and the chief officer hastily took their bearings, after which the former announced: "Kalii's village lies five miles due south, but it is next to impossible for us to make our way in the darkness through the dense forests which are between us and it, tired out and hungry as we are. We'll move away from this stream and camp, and creep up to the village to-morrow, seizing the chief, if possible, at nightfall."

The men looked as if they would much prefer to risk the night journey right away, but as the captain's word was law they said nothing. Most of them brightened up, however, when he said that scouts would be thrown out in couples, and that he hoped some of them might find a practicable track to within a short distance of the village. "Two men can move silently and without leaving suspicious traces," he added, "whereas an army such as we are might blunder into every pitfall on the way, and leave tracks that a blind man could pick up. We must remember, too, that it means fight if we run into a German party."

"It will be bad for them if we do," said Hordern. "I have long wanted to get a smash at some of their kind."

The Island Traders

"Which opportunity, I hope, will not come your way," returned the captain. "Who among you will volunteer for scouting duty to-night?"

The men moved towards him in a body, each individual loudly putting forth his claims to be allowed that honour.

"I was a kangaroo hunter before I took to the sea, Cap," said one. "I reckon you can't get a better than me."

"I was cook in a shearer's shed," another interrupted, "and the way I had to dodge round——"

"I've been a sailor all my life," Saunders broke in; "but my last job was on a customs boat up around Port Darwin, and we had to watch the Chinese."

"I've been a tramcar conductor," put in Hordern, "and so used to making myself small and of no account, that I am sure I don't even cast a shadow now. Let me be one of the scouts."

"You had better pick your men, sir," laughed Henderson. "I know the village myself, and I believe I could go to it pretty straight from here."

"If there's any chance of trouble, you can't leave my engineer boys and myself out," reminded Mr. Melville.

Young Smith and Raymond were greatly dis-

turbed. They had already formed plans, and in them they played the chief parts themselves. "There does not seem to be much chance of our getting a show," Smith muttered. "We're only silly youngsters, of course, and would likely make a mess of things."

"Don't say a word," Raymond whispered. "I've got an idea."

"So have I, dozens of them, but we'll get no chance to try them."

"Yes we shall. Come away from the crowd and I'll tell you."

The two plotters walked apart from the others, and Raymond explained his idea. It seemed to please Smith greatly, for he listened intently at first, then became excited, and finally uttered a whoop of delight, which at once drew the stern glance of the captain upon him, and he became silent.

Shortly afterwards the sun sank behind the volcanic peaks that flanked the great gorge, and, dividing into groups, the men kindled camp fires and prepared the best supper each party's cooking capabilities allowed. After supper the captain and Henderson picked out the camp guards and sent them out around the camp, with orders to come in and be relieved at midnight. Others who

had had experience of prospecting life in New Guinea and elsewhere were chosen as scouts to go and keep the village in sight, and those remaining were ordered to rest so as to be able to bear the brunt of the work on the morrow.

Soon the camp was quiet, except where the captain and his officers sat discussing plans, and the moon, which had only so recently, it seemed, left them, shone out in the heavens. The dense forest also became silent as the noisy cockatoos, birds of paradise, and the many members of the parrot tribe dropped off to sleep among the foliage, and now only the occasional scream of some bird as it was seized by a wild cat or other night prowler, and the snort of a wandering boar on its hunt for supper, broke the stillness of the tropical night. The volcanic peaks belched forth fire spasmodically, and the moon climbed round the great arc overhead.

But the camp was not asleep, as the captain imagined, as he and his officers elaborated their schemes, and suddenly two figures sat up on the ground where they had been resting at full length, and crawled away into the darkness. They were coatless and hatless, but a fringe of leaves adorned their heads, and their skins, wherever visible, were black.

"Have you your revolver, Ray?" one said to the other.

"Yes," came the answer, "and a knife too. Lead on, and let's have a look at the village by moonlight."

Smith studied a pocket compass for a moment, and then looked at the stars as if taking a rough bearing. "All right!" he responded; "come on."

They glided quietly into the darkness in a southerly direction.

"Yes," the captain was saying at that moment, "it's a big part for a mere lad to play, but somehow I think he'll do it. He's got pluck and plenty of self-reliance, and is true to the core."

"That's so," admitted Melville; "if the thing can be done, Raymond will do it."

"But do you expect the Germans will really send a party on shore?" asked Hordern. "I should think that the French would watch them too well to allow of that?"

"They must, nevertheless, if they wish to secure Kalii," answered the captain, "and my idea is to get our hands on him first. We can carry him to the *Mota*, where he'll not readily be found, and if Raymond can impersonate him until we can get the French sent up, we'll have won the game."

"But why need Raymond impersonate Kalii

after we get our hands on him?" Henderson asked.

"Because if the Germans arrived and found the natives alarmed because of their chief's disappearance, they would at once suspect us, and publish to the world that we were mere kidnappers, and therefore not entitled to recognition other than with a short rope attached to a yard-arm. But if they find Kalii in his village among his own people, and he does not fall in with their views, as they doubtless have already arranged that he will, a block will ensue, for Kalii's people will still complain if their chief is taken by force."

"But what if they do?" said Melville. "The Germans will risk the results."

"Yes, ultimately; but they will waste a day or two first trying to show Kalii the error of his ways, and by that time we can have sent a French expedition up to the village, and then the whole game of watching each other will be played over again. Meanwhile Vatii will already have asked for Australian protection, and while the French and Germans are snarling, or smiling, at each other, the real Kalii, if we do not fail, will be on his way on the *Mota's* launch to Fat Jack's place, whence he will be conveyed to Sydney in the regular monthly trading steamer belonging to our

company. Long before this, of course, Raymond will have slipped away from the village, for whenever we have the French and Germans watching each other our work will be practically accomplished, and although they discover the trick very soon after he leaves, they will not be able to help themselves. While the fastest cruisers of both parties are chasing the *Mota* all over the ocean—or rather through waters that I know very well and which are not charted—both Vatii and Kalii will be receiving the freedom of Sydney and Melbourne, and dining with the Governor-general and other important people, who will give them presents of glass beads and coloured ribbons. In return for all this disinterested kindness, and with the desire that it may long continue, Vatii and Kalii will then ask Australia to help them to protect their country against those who would like to take it from them.”

“You’ve got it all measured out to a decimal point,” laughed Melville. “But when these two free and noble chiefs get Australian protection, may not Germany and France still raise objections?”

“They will be too late then. The might of Great Britain is behind Australia to protect those who ask for help from her. Australia will tell

both France and Germany that she will stand no interference in her affairs, and if they persist, they will be the aggressors in a war in which Britain, Japan, and probably America, would soon sweep them entirely from the Pacific. But they won't say anything. When they realize they've lost the game, they'll smile and say they did not want the islands anyway, just as Australia will do if we fail, only we'll pay the penalty of failure pretty stiffly ourselves."

"But we won't fail, sir," Mr. Melville said. "We'll blacken our faces and fight the other invaders before we'll allow Kalii to fall into their hands."

"Some of us will have to make ourselves into natives in any case," the captain went on. "We can't leave Raymond alone among them, and some of us must be his bodyguard. Others will keep that underground passage open for our retreat, and steam must be kept up on the *Mota* so that we can make a dash for the open sea at any moment. But try and get some sleep now; we'll need all our strength to-morrow."

"I wonder why that young beggar Smith has not been making himself heard of late?" remarked Hordern. "He and Raymond must really be tired out when they are so quiet."

"And so they should be," yawned Henderson. "They've both been dancing about these last thirty-six hours, and even youth can't stand that sort of game for long."

"Leave them alone," said the captain. "We can instruct Raymond as to what we expect of him in the morning."

But Raymond was anticipating instructions.

Soon after the officers fell asleep, and the stillness of tropical night lay over the land. At midnight the camp guards came in and were relieved by an equal number of their comrades who had been sleeping. And the moon slowly sank behind a great bank of clouds.

Meanwhile, two figures were sitting on a tree stump some miles away disconsolately bewailing the fact that they had lost their bearings.

"We must have come a good bit more than five miles, Ray," one said, surveying a pocket compass ruefully.

"Yes, I am quite sure we have. We must have missed the village."

"Well, are we to go back to camp and admit that we can't carry out our own plans, or make a try to find it?"

"Let's make a try, by all means. We've most likely passed it, and didn't notice any signs of out-

lying habitations because they would be all overgrown with foliage and, of course, as quiet as a graveyard. I'll tell you—we'll circle round from here and chance striking it. I heard the captain say that there was a road from the coast to Kalii's village, and if we have passed it, we are bound to hit it on the other side."

"Of course, I never thought of that," cried Smith, jumping to his feet. "Come on, and we'll prospect for that road. I calculate we are about two miles south of the village, if the old man made no mistake, so we must cross that track somewhere."

The two black-faced figures started off again, and had barely travelled a hundred yards through the overhanging creepers and dense forest undergrowth, when they stepped out on a long cleared line which stretched away unbroken, save where projecting tree-limbs cast shadows over it, until lost in the gloom.

"Well, we have found the road, Smith," said Raymond, "but you'll have to bring your knowledge of astronomy, navigation, and all your other sciences into play to determine in which direction the village lies."

"That's as easy as driving a tramcar. This island is nearly north and south, and the road

runs from the east side, where the known gap in the reef is. But we came inland from the west side of the island and then travelled south, so"—Smith drew a map in the sand with his fingers—"so," he continued, "we must have passed the village and got to the other side of it; consequently we've got to turn westerly, as we are not particularly anxious to meet a German party coming up from the sea."

They began to run down the track, but suddenly Smith stopped and began feeling the surface of the ground with his hands. "I have a suspicion, Ray," he said, "that we're not the first people with boots on who have passed along here to-night." He lit a match, and instantly his suspicions were confirmed. The sand was covered with footprints, and it needed not a Sherlock Holmes to tell that these imprints were made by shod feet, and that neither Britain, France, nor Australia was the land in which the footgear had been manufactured.

"What does it mean, Smith?" asked Raymond, a horrible fear growing upon him.

"It means, Ray, that the old man has played the game and lost by a few hours, unless we can pull things off ourselves now. These marks were made to-day, or rather yesterday afternoon,

by a body of Germans, and they most likely have Kalii in their hands now. We'll dodge along and see if——"

Raymond clapped his hand over his mouth and pulled him into the side of the road. Smith did not need to ask the reason. A powerful-looking German sailor, in orthodox dress and big top-boots, was advancing down the track towards them. His carbine was unslung, and although they could not see his face distinctly, they felt that he had heard them.

But he passed, muttering to himself, and a minute later the boys heard him exchange some words with another man who had apparently come out on to the road from the scrub.

"This is no place for us," Smith whispered. "I don't want to be shot without having made a try for the old man."

"Let's run down the road, then," suggested Raymond. "The German camp must be near here, for that man who passed was on sentry duty. Perhaps they haven't gone into the village yet."

They were already running quietly down the track, but with ears and eyes alert for the slightest sign or sound which might betray the presence of anyone. Suddenly Raymond touched his comrade's arm and pointed into the scrub. A number

of small fires were dying out, and one or two figures were pacing around as if on guard.

"That's their camp," Raymond whispered. "They can only have got here a few hours ago. We can still beat them. Look! I see a group of officers round one of the fires. Quick! What are we to do?"

"I am not good at thinking in cold blood, Ray. You'll have to boss this show and I'll play second. I can't keep cool enough."

"Yes you can. Let us think the matter out. Oh, here's a sentry coming again! Climb this tree; we can talk safely if we go high enough among the branches."

In a second they were climbing a tall palm-tree which stood on the edge of the clearing. Its stem was overgrown with creepers, which afforded a good foothold, and soon they were hidden in the great web of interlaced vegetation which made the upper parts of trees a world apart from that upon the ground. Birds screamed angrily at being disturbed, and many long-tailed creatures of the lizard family scurried farther into the aerial forest as the adventurers approached.

"Wait here now," Raymond whispered, as they gained a spot completely hidden from underneath, and where a network of stout creepers formed a

The Island Traders

natural seat. "We can talk if we exercise care, and those birds will cover our voices with their chattering. The sentries will think they have disturbed them themselves."

"Fire away then, Ray. What are we to do?"

"It appears to me that we had better go back to camp and inform the captain that the Germans are here. He may ambush them and steal Kalii from them then, unless we can bring on the boys and cut him out to-night from his people."

"But we don't really know that he is not now a prisoner among the Germans."

"We'll find that out presently. I suppose you wouldn't care to go back yourself, Smith, while I investigate here. Our time is too short for us to attend to everything together."

"You may dry up on that, Ray. I am with you now, and I am going to stay with you, and all the dodges you can invent won't send me away. We'll fight the beggars ourselves if we must, or go back to camp together. What could I say for myself when our boys knew I had left you among the Germans?"

"Very well, we'll stick together. But it was to save time I meant when I proposed your going away. Let us crawl along among these branches until we are near enough to watch the officers round that fire. We'll perhaps be able to find



B 934

THEY WERE DIRECTLY ABOVE THE OFFICERS' CAMP-FIRE

Page 225

out if Kalii is here or not, and who knows but what we might overhear some of their plans!"

"Lead on, and watch your feet then, and don't grip that kind of creeper, because it stings pretty badly, as I have just found out."

Carefully, and as silently as possible, the boys launched themselves out into the entanglements, and worked their way towards the camp. They soon discovered that a limb of a tree invariably projected in the direction they wished to go, at some height, and availing themselves of any help its more solid body yielded, and swinging across hand over hand where long detached tendrils lent any aid, they forced a passage from tree to tree until they were at length directly above the officers' camp fire.

The officers were speaking together in German, and this came as a disappointment to the boys, who, strangely enough, had not taken into account the fact that people usually prefer to talk in their native language.

Both Smith and Raymond, however, had a knowledge of that tongue sufficient to enable them to gather the effect of the conversation.

Among the men in the group below Raymond recognized Schwartz, the one-time companion of Herr Branstein and Rosenthal. He would have

liked to drop a cocoanut on him in token of remembrance, but he knew that that would mean an end to any hope of winning a game in which personal matters had to yield place to what really was patriotism, although, if they failed, it would be known by another name.

The officers laughed and talked carelessly, and the listeners in the trees learned that they belonged to the warship which had passed the *Mota* while she was being escorted, supposedly, by the F.M.S. *Polynesian*. The warship had gone on to Sydney and there picked up Schwartz, and left again to try to effect a coup by getting Kalii into their hands. Their spies had told them by cable of the departure of the *Seine* from Noumea, and also of the supposed connection the *Mota* had with the French interests, and they laughed gaily as they talked of how they had stolen a march upon all parties.

"Yes," an officer remarked, "one day may win or lose an empire, let alone a group of Pacific islands. Outside the reef just now there will be all the French boats in the Pacific, if their secret agents are as smart as ours."

"Oh, cut that out!" growled Schwartz. "All our agents are by no means smart, or we would have had a German fleet outside too by this time."

“Well, it doesn’t matter. We may take it that our boats from the eastern service—one was in Fiji, I think, pretending to be in need of something or other—and one or more from the north will be converging on the gap just now. If the Frenchmen do not come along no harm is done, and if they do, as we all expect, then the officers of both fleets will put in time entertaining each other to dinner, and generally pretending that they are studying coral-reef formations, and that to watch each other would be the last thing on earth or sea that they would think of doing. But while they play we work. We are here first, and while our friends amuse themselves we get peace to play our own game, knowing that no other party dare come ashore, and our own ship will keep well out to sea, so as to avoid suspicion, until we signal her from land. Then we need not care. We can laugh at the French and tell them they have been tricked, and as they will then be too late to alter matters, they will laugh and say they do not care, and we will give a banquet in their honour, and the islands will be part of His Imperial Majesty’s empire for ever.”

“Hoch!” roared the other members of the party, and the speaker continued. “At daylight we will advance upon the village and persuade the great

chief Kalii to accept a present. We will also take the flag with us, and the band, and before the sun is far on its journey the flag will wave, the band will play, a salute will be fired, and I, Commander Siemens of the Imperial German Navy—by virtue of my commission, and for and on behalf of His Imperial Majesty, whom I serve—will have proclaimed the New Scotian group annexed to the great German Empire.”

Loud and long rang the hohs and other exclamations. The German commander evidently had everything arranged to perfection, and had carefully counted his chickens before they had emerged from the shell.

“Come,” said Smith while the cheering still continued, “there’s only one chance left for us, and you must do it. We must adopt the very first plan we thought of.”

“And that is——?” asked Raymond, a strange thrill running through him. Well he knew what Smith was thinking of. He had foreseen the only alternative himself.

“And that is,” continued Smith, “that you must be Kalii before daylight.”

CHAPTER IX

Raymond Plays the Game

THE boys looked at each other. "What about the other Kalii?" Raymond asked quietly. He was thinking rapidly, and recalling to mind the plans Smith and he had evolved at an earlier stage for obtaining possession of the islands for Australia. But there was no time to allow of any hesitation. They could not now go back to their own camp and bring men along soon enough to save the situation, even at the risk of a fight. Whatever was going to be done must be set about at once, and on their own responsibility. Raymond decided quickly. He did not think for a moment of the risks he would run being out of all proportion to his possible personal gain if successful. Nor did the fact that in him lay his country's only chance appeal much to him. He thought only of Captain Murchison's forlorn hope, and of how he was ready to give his life so that his mother would not suffer privation. "And now his sole opportunity depends on the youngest members of his party," Raymond

mused, "and, by Jupiter! they won't fail him. Yes, Smith, I know what we've got to do; I am ready. We needn't kill the real Kalii unless we are forced to do so. Come along."

They grasped hands, and without a word began to work their way forward over the sleeping camp to where they knew the road lay. It was slow and laborious work, and they had to exercise extreme care to prevent themselves from being detected by the sentries posted all round. But they succeeded in reaching the track and swinging down to the ground immediately after a camp guard had passed. They raced along in the shadows until another sentry loomed up before them. They threw themselves flat upon the ground and waited. That sentry never knew his luck. Had he seemed to hesitate, or even to look at the ground near where the boys lay, they would have sprung upon him like mountain wild cats, and it would have gone hard with the unfortunate German indeed, for their muscles were like bands of flexible steel, and their strength far in excess of what their lithe forms indicated. But he passed on, humming an air of his far-away native land, and next moment the boys were once more running towards the village.

They met with no further opposition, and sud-

denly the track opened into a large clearing, in which stood several erections of most quaint design, nearly every one being surrounded by a garden fenced with bamboos. Raymond paused. He had never seen a native village before, except in the glimpse he had had in passing of one of the Fijian settlements. Several strange dwellings were mounted high upon poles which stood about thirty feet out of the ground. The houses themselves seemed to be cleverly contrived of bamboo and interlaced fibres, with thatched roofs. These all sat upon platforms laid upon the tops of the poles, and long ladders provided the means of access. Most of them were shaped like an equilateral triangle, but some showed evidences of more elaborate design.

All the houses, however, were not mounted on poles. These seemed to belong to the chief people only, for the village proper consisted of about thirty or forty beehive-shaped structures, with a square hole at the bottom of each, over which hung a mat, serving as a doorway. These houses were all surrounded by white cane fences, and a garden usually stretched behind. It was too dark to take in all the details, but Raymond noticed that each house was overgrown with luxuriantly flowering creepers, that the gardens were well tended, and that every-

thing about the village was scrupulously clean and in good order. He also saw that large, evidently public, gardens were fenced off at one end of the village, in which flourished tea, coffee, cocoa, and tobacco plants side by side, also vanilla, sugar cane, and many other shrubs which he did not know. The indispensable yam grew in every spare piece of ground, and the taro was also well in evidence.

"It seems that the people here are half civilized," Raymond whispered to Smith. "Look at those gardens."

"Of course they are," Smith returned. "The missionaries have taught the natives almost everything. That big square building over there is the school, and that ornamental erection farther down is a church. But don't worry; old Tamii's village is not many hours' journey away, and his people are cannibals. No white man that I know of has ever seen his place, although Kalii's village is fairly well known now. But see! that must be the chief's house over among those palm trees. Let's go and investigate at once, or daylight will be here before we have deposed Kalii."

They went over to the house, and at once found many signs denoting the high rank of its occupier, exquisite carvings and fancy mats being displayed

Raymond Plays the Game 233

lavishly on and around the wooden walls and roof. A grotesque series of ornaments, chiefly boars' tusks, surmounted the gable, and the whole nestled peacefully in the shade of half a dozen towering palm trees.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Smith as they approached. "I am sure I saw two men disappearing round the end of the house just now. Get your gun ready."

"It is your imagination playing you a trick," Raymond answered. "I've been seeing people lurking wherever there was a shadow ever since we entered the village. But there is a light in that house. I see a gleam beyond that great mat hanging over the doorway."

"Then let us have a look inside. I should know Kalii, because I saw him once down on the shore and took a snap of him."

They climbed silently to the veranda and peered behind the hanging net. Next moment they entered, and stood in a dark space between the outer and an inner mat which hid from view the apartment beyond. Light streamed through between the edges of the mat and the border of the space it covered. Men were talking inside in a language which Raymond instantly recognized as pure Mota. He caught Smith's arm and whispered: "They are talking about the Germans

coming at daylight. They know they are here. Wait until we hear their story."

Smith peeped inside. "That's Kalii all right," he whispered. "The other fellow is likely his prime minister."

Raymond looked through: there were only two men, and he thought that Smith and he might be able to handle both. But he became greatly interested in the conversation. The elder man was counselling the other to offer fight to the Germans. "Tamii will bring his warriors to help us," he said. "Let not therefore the great chief Kalii be afraid of these hoch hoch people from over the sea who want to steal our land from us. The people who send us traders will not allow us to suffer if we ask them to protect us. Let Kalii send to the great land near to our own shores and tell its people of his trouble. They are a great white people who make the island people free, and who do not make them slaves. Kalii's people were here thousands of years before the oui oui men or the hoch hoch men were civilized. Let us sweep them back to the sea. We are stronger than they among the mountains."

"You speak well, oh most brave warrior," replied the youthful Kalii. "I will tell them when they come that we do not want them, and that if

Raymond Plays the Game 235

they do not go away we will fight. Our God is the same as their God, and He will not see His island people fall in battle. The white missionary told me. Go now and let Kalii sleep, for soon the sun will rise on the islands of my people once more."

The elder man rose quietly. "Manobo is happy now," he said. "He will tell the people that Kalii has still got the spirit of his warrior fathers in him. I am glad, oh my chief, and with my sons and every man of our people will die for you and our country before we allow you or it to be taken from us." He bowed quaintly, and retired backward towards the matted doorway.

The boys drew back into the farthest corner of the apartment, and prepared to seize the warrior chief Manobo if he saw them. But Manobo was thinking deeply of other things, and did not raise his eyes when the mat fell between him and his great chief's presence. He doubted Kalii. All night he had been striving to shake his mind from the idea of giving his country away to the Germans, who all the people knew were in the vicinity. Manobo had been selected by the people to speak for them, and he had done his best; but he feared that Kalii had no intention of altering his mind on the subject, and that he had promised

not to give up his rights merely to get rid of a too persistent teller of plain truths, which, even in the South Sea islands, are sometimes unpleasant.

And he was right. Kalii waited until he heard the outer mat flap back into its place, then he laughed scornfully. "Fools!" he muttered in the Mota tongue. "Do they think that they can advise the great Kalii—Kalii whose fathers were chiefs when they were but wild pigs? The German missionary told Kalii long ago that his country would never grow great until the white Kaiser became his friend. The German chiefs told me last moon, too, that they would come here with big floating thunders, and give me flags and big drums and guns. They also told Kalii they would help him to wipe out the bad Tamii, who is no Christian like me, and make Kalii chief over all his people. Kalii is no fool. He will welcome the hoch hoch men, and then go and hang Tamii on top of his own tapu house, and marry all his wives."

Like most people who think themselves important, Kalii was fond of hearing his own voice, and it is just possible that had he not indulged in the monologue which proved him to be a traitor, the boys would have modified their plans to his advantage. He retired behind a heavily screened doorway, which presumably led to his bedchamber

Raymond Plays the Game 237

and Raymond took the opportunity to make his comrade acquainted with what the under chief Manobo had said, how Kalii had answered, and then how he had given himself away.

“It is fairly playing into our hands,” muttered Smith. “The natives will be so pleased to find their chief sticking to his guns to-morrow, that they’ll not notice any little peculiarities in his conduct; and if they do, they’ll put it down to excitement.”

At this point Kalii re-entered the larger room half undressed. His full dress consisted of a piece of turkey-red cloth, which hung from the middle of his body in artistic folds, and a pair of tan shoes he had bought from Fat Jack’s floating emporium the last time it had visited the shores of his domain. He had now discarded the shoes. The other part was a fixture only removed when a wandering missionary or a kindly trader gave him a new outfit, for Kalii hoarded all the money of his state—copra, mats, boars’ tusks, and shells—with hopes of his one day being able to purchase a set of weird instruments of war for his men like what Fat Jack had procured for Tamii, and left on the shore in exchange for many boatloads of Tamii’s people’s produce. He extinguished the light—a piece of some fragrant fibrous substance floating

on a tastefully carved half cocoanut shell filled with fat.

“Now!” whispered Raymond, and next second the great chief Kalii was seized in the clutches of what he vaguely thought were a band of devils of his former religion. He could not call out, because one of them had gripped his throat, and a number were breaking his back by bending it. Kalii was no coward, although he was quite willing to sell his country—South Sea islanders, especially Melanesians, are a people who do not fear death half so much as they dread the anger of their ancestors—and he struggled valiantly, exerting all his strength to throw the devils from him. Suddenly stars flashed before his eyes, his head reeled as if he had been drinking too much bad fire-water, his back seemed as if breaking in two, and everything became blank.

The daring pair then relit the lamp and carried their victim into his bedroom, where Smith at once bound him securely to the floor and gagged him in a manner which showed he had previously studied the science to advantage.

Raymond undid the chief's turkey-red garment and fastened it around his own body, and then he and Smith began to add little touches to his hair, and to rub more coffee-stain dye, which they had

Raymond Plays the Game 239

carried from camp, into his face. Finally everything was completed to Smith's satisfaction.

"You are as like him as need be," he said. "No one will have time to examine you too closely after the band begins to play."

"Which I, as the great chief Kalii, would not tolerate, if anyone did," returned Raymond. "From now until this business is ended one way or another, I am going to make myself believe I really am Kalii, otherwise my nerve might leave me when we need it most."

"There is not much fear of your nerve failing you," said Smith. "But if we only had some means of getting this fellow away — Oh, Raymond, what about clearing out with him now?"

"No use; the Germans would annex the place just the same, because there would not be anyone to object. No, Smith, we must see the thing right through now. But this chief surely does not live in this house alone. Perhaps even now we are being watched."

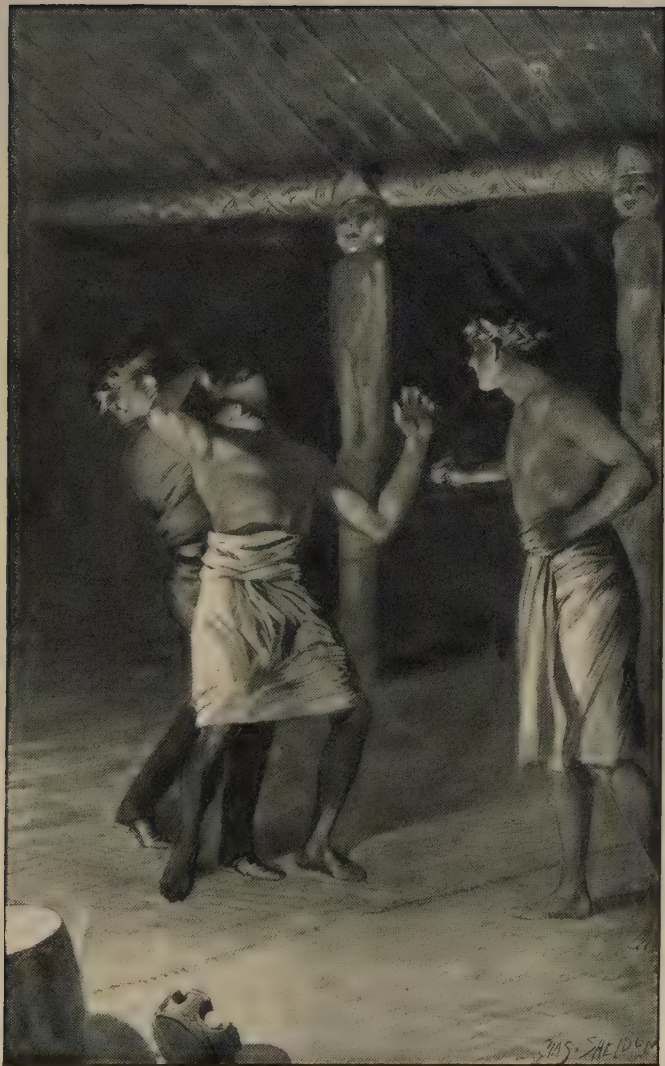
"I don't think so. These South Sea kings don't care about having any inferior being sleeping under the royal roof, and even if there were anyone, you couldn't wake him without firing a plug of dynamite under him. I'll make myself up as

your body servant. Hallo! we're cornered. Someone has entered the front room."

Instantly a babel of sound poured from Raymond's mouth, and, seizing the light, he rushed angrily into the outer apartment, still screaming out a tempestuous torrent of what to Smith seemed meaningless sounds. But he was quick to see that his comrade had assumed his rôle in earnest, and that his duty was to back him up at once; so, with his revolver hidden in the folds of an old garment of the chief's which he had assumed, he stepped out beside Raymond.

But the intruder, a dandified-looking native dressed in a flaring yellow lower garment, was now speaking also. He seemed somewhat surprised at his reception, and gave the impression that he had understood the chief had expected him. His manner at once became deferential, and Raymond's tones became slightly mollified. They talked for some time in a manner most bewildering to Smith, until he became conscious that Raymond was talking English. "Go for him, Smith," he was saying. "He is my chief adviser, and knows of my plan for asking the Germans in. He has come by arrangement to talk over the business and bargain for his share of the plunder——"

Smith heard no more, for he had thrown himself



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HE HAD THROWN HIMSELF UPON THE UNSUSPECTING MAN

Page 241

Raymond Plays the Game 241

upon the unsuspecting man and brought him to the ground before the astonished victim had realized his intention sufficiently to offer resistance.

"It's a bit below the belt the way we are fighting, Ray," he remarked, as they gagged and bound the prisoner with stripes of Smith's old garment and bundled him into the room beside his chief.

"We are not fighting for glory," responded the new chief in a voice that seemed to belong to a man suddenly grown old, "but for our country and Captain Murchison. Get into that fellow's dress and we'll make you as like him as possible. You will then be my chief adviser while my reign here lasts. Dear me! it will be sunrise in half an hour. I wish we had Henderson or Melville here to help us. I never had any dealings with Germans, as a king, before."

"Never mind, Ray, keep a tight grip on your kingdom, and the natives will stand by you, as you know. Let us hunt around the palace for something to eat now, for who knows when we'll have a chance to eat again?"

They began to search for the larder, and finally found it in an erection built behind the house. They helped themselves freely to cold fowl, yams, and fruits, and just as the sun appeared above the

The Island Traders

eastern ranges, returned to the chief's bedchamber to see how their prisoners were keeping. Smith entered first and uttered a cry of despair. The room was empty.

"We're up a tree now, Ray," he laughed recklessly. "Shall we cut and run for it? Hallo! I hear a band."

"That's the German National Anthem. The Germans must be on the move" Raymond answered nonchalantly, gazing at the place where their captives had lain only a little time before. "But we'll not run away. We'll face the music—German or any other kind. Our prisoners have not escaped, nor have they been released by anyone, or we would see the rags with which we bound them lying around. They have been carried away and may still be prisoners. At any rate, I am Kalii, and Kalii I will remain, although I have to fight the original in personal combat."

Notwithstanding Raymond's words, the boys felt sadly downcast, for the thought would keep forcing itself upon them that a party of German scouts might have carried off their prisoners. But they had little time to think. The Germans were now on the march, and the martial airs their band was playing sounded out clearly and inspiringly on the morning breeze. The inhabitants of the village

Raymond Plays the Game 243

were also moving about now. Evidently they were well aware of the ceremony about to take place, and had their own opinions as to what it meant for them. Raymond and Smith saw the warrior Manobo haranguing a crowd of stalwart natives, and shortly afterwards he led them in person towards the chief's house.

Meanwhile the Germans drew nearer.

"Manobo believes I will not keep faithful to my people," Raymond said, the feeling that he was about to play a part such as no actor on any stage had ever performed filling his whole being. If an actor were not convincing in his impersonations on the stage, the audience would laugh and say unkind things, and perhaps another actor might be given his place; but in the present drama the slightest slip meant consequences about which it was better not to think. And Raymond had never acted a part in his life hitherto.

"What does a chief do in any ceremony?" he asked Smith, controlling his feelings with an effort of will, as Manobo and a fast-increasing army of natives approached.

"I don't know, Ray, but Kalii and his people are christianized; the ceremonies will be a burlesque of our own."

"I'll let them lead off, anyway, but remember

you are my chief adviser, and have a strong party influence of your own. I wish we had some of the *Mota's* men near us." They went out and stood on the broad veranda, and on seeing them the natives set up a great shout, but whether it was intended for a cheer, or something else, the boys could not determine.

"Most high and mighty Kalii," cried Manobo in his own language when the procession came near, "the men from the floating thunders are at hand. I have told your people that you will not sell them, and we are here ready to obey your commands." Manobo stood erect and proud as he spoke. He looked a splendid savage. In his right hand he held a long spear with a ferociously barbed point. All his followers were armed with similar weapons or with spiked clubs. Evidently they had their doubts as to the honesty of their chief.

"My commands, oh faithful Manobo," cried Raymond, copying the voice of Kalii wonderfully well, and with perfect intonation, "are that you, with our warriors, will receive the foreigners in a manner befitting a brave and independent people who have nothing to fear. You will treat them as a Christain people extending hospitality to another, and make their visit as pleasant to them

Raymond Plays the Game 245

as lies within our powers of entertaining. I leave everything to you."

"Pretty cute, that dodge," muttered Smith. "He knows more about our habits of entertaining than we do."

The people again shouted wildly, and Manobo looked somewhat surprised. He had hardly expected the greedy and indolent Kalii to make such a speech; but he was still in doubt, for even yet his chief might be plotting something different from what he had said.

"What does the mighty warrior and strong counsellor Tapiloa advise as to the answer to the foreigners?" he cried.

"He says," cried Kalii hastily, "that my brave warriors are well able to drive them back to their floating thunders if they forget that we are a people as free as the air the great God has given us. If we ever join our country to any other, let it be to that great land which lies in our own sea, whose people have thunders as great as any other people's, and who have already set free many of our island brethren who were slaves. They also can give us all the good things the white man makes in exchange for the products of our own land and labour, and will not suffer us to be insulted by a people who live on the other side of the great seas."

There was no mistaking the nature of the shouts which now filled the air. The natives were cheering their chief, and assuring him of their abilities to sweep the foreigner from existence, if need be. They did not fully understand his reference to the great white man's country in their own sea, but they all knew that the islands which were under the protection of the beautiful piece of coloured cloth known as the "Union Jackii" were prosperous and their peoples happy, while those associated with the oui oui men and the hoch hoch men were countries wherein the peoples were slaves.

"Will the great chief Kalii come with his warriors to the reception hall?" cried Manobo. "I hear the strange noises of the foreigners drawing near, and we must be prepared to receive them."

"Lead on then, my wise and brave Manobo. We will show them that we fear them not."

Shouting and laughing like children, the natives turned and ran towards a large bamboo-ribbed structure with a thatched roof near the middle of the village, and sedately—as befitting the dignity of a great chief and his adviser—Kalii and Tapiloa followed, talking to each other, but not in the Mota tongue.

And now "Die Wacht am Rhein" was thunder-

Raymond Plays the Game 247

ing to the skies through brazen instruments, firing all white men within hearing with a strange thrill, but appealing not in the slightest to the natives, who were interested only in the drum. The German party swept bravely into the village with colours flying, and every man dressed to make an imposing show—rifles over their shoulders and a machine gun lumbering behind, and half a dozen gorgeously uniformed officers with drawn flashing swords in their hands.

Proudly they marched up to the village square opposite the reception hall, and formed into a circle round their large standard until the air was played through. The natives looked on in sullen silence. They were not impressed with the display. If they were as wealthy as they wished people to think, why did they not wear turkey-red garments? The pompous air of the officer commanding, too, compared unfavourably with that of the kindly old chief of the floating thunders that at one time had visited them from the white man's land in their own seas. He had given presents to everyone and wanted nothing in exchange, but this noisy people, who drowned out the music of their drum with other strange and uncanny instruments, wanted their land, and evidently had brought nothing to give in presents.

The new Kalii heard the murmurs of his people and quickly understood them. He did not know the proper etiquette of chiefs under the circumstances, but reasoning that the Germans would know as little as he, he gave Smith a kick to recall him to a sense of duty, and gravely walked towards the German party. A native, evidently a household servant, ran to carry the trailing end of his flaring garment, but, thinking that the sight of the orthodox nether garments of civilization which the chief wore underneath might prove bad for the would-be train-bearer's nerves, Smith, or rather Tapiloa, promptly knocked him down. The incident, however, showed the new Kalii that the old one had adopted some strange ideas of European customs, and he resolved to profit by his knowledge.

The band stopped, the men formed into a square with military precision and grounded arms, and the officer commanding advanced to meet Kalii, saying in German that he had a letter from the Kaiser, written specially for his dear friend Kalii.

Kalii smiled. He thought the Kaiser had a habit of writing letters and sending telegrams which made them rather commonplace. He took the proffered letter with an elaborate bow, nevertheless, then, remembering that a knowledge of

Raymond Plays the Game 249

European manners was not expected of him, he opened the many-sealed document and read it as well as his acquaintance with the German language would permit. It, of course, was no letter to Kalii, but merely the Kaiser's commission to the commander to annex the New Scotian group of islands by any means he thought best, short of war. He handed the formidable-looking document to Tapiloa, and, for want of anything better to say, began to tell the commander in Mota that they had been having very dry weather of late, but that he hoped the rain would come soon.

"Hoch der Kaiser!" exclaimed the officer, when he paused for breath, and his men took up the cheer.

Smith meanwhile, after glancing at the letter, had handed it to Manobo, who read it, or appeared to do so, upside down, and passed it on to someone else, the commander watching its progress with anxious eyes.

Wondering how long the farce was going to last, Kalii the second began a long speech in Mota, in which he informed all who cared to hear that the commander was a fool, that his men were rogues, and that his warriors would presently dine on them.

"Hoch, hoch!" again shouted the Germans,

and the natives who had heard their chief's words also shouted their approval, Manobo adding some words to Tapiloa to the effect that Kalii was truly a fearless chief. Tapiloa responded with a grin. He did not know what all the talking was about, but he could see that Kalii had the sympathy of his people with him.

The commander looked nonplussed for a moment, and signed for a junior officer to step forward. This gentleman seemed filled with an air of self-importance, and Kalii decided that his conceit should receive a rebuke.

"You speaky Englis?" the officer demanded, adopting the common vernacular of the South Seas—sandalwood English.

"My word, yes, you bet," responded Kalii, remembering Vatii's style of talk, "but not to little fellow like you. If the boss he no talky, talky, Kalii he no savvy neither. Tapiloa, you speaky the little fellow."

The officer's face flushed with mortification, and his comrades had difficulty in preserving their gravity of countenance. They all had a knowledge of English, but were not well versed in the South Sea variety.

"Tapiloa he waity," said the chief adviser of Kalii. "What you wanty say?"

Raymond Plays the Game 251

“Me wanty tell you if you cry ‘Hoch’ ven ve put up dis flag ve vill give you all lot presents,” said the officer.

“Hoch!” cried Tapiloa innocently.

“You telly chief we put up flag and ask him to bring all his big men down to ships to get presents.”

“What presents you give?” enquired the cautious Kalii, seeing that Manobo and one or two other important natives who understood English were listening.

“Oh, we gif plenty turkey-red, and beads, and clocks, and——” The officer paused to think of other articles, and Tapiloa proceeded to help him out of his difficulty.

“You give pop pops?” he asked in childlike innocence.

“Yes,” lied the German unblushingly, “ve gif pop pops plenty.”

“You gif talky talky machine an plenty knives to sticky into people?” continued the bargainer.

“Yes, we gif plenty all that, and more.”

“You give big drum, and plenty more noise machine like what you people blow with mouth? And give pianos, and ping pong, and football, and plenty looking-glasses, and cigarette, and old clothes, and diabolos?”

"Yes, yes," answered the other, "ve gif all that. Tell your chief."

"Tell him to hurry up and ask for the German Empire while he is at it," put in the commanding officer in German.

"And you give floating thunders and plenty rope to hang bad people? And you give lollies and——?" Tapiloa paused; for the moment he couldn't think of anything else.

"Ve gif everything you vant," the officer said wearily, "and all for putting up dis flag."

Tapiloa took the flag in his hands, smelt it, and handed it to Manobo, who did likewise, and passed it round until it became lost to view.

The Germans realized that their beloved emblem had gone the way of the commander's commission, but they calculated that they would speedily see about their return once the country was annexed.

Kalii, who had been speaking with Manobo and some others, now thought it time for him to have a say in matters, and while the Germans were searching for another flag which might serve for their immediate purpose, he cried out: "Then we no want your presents. You keep them and go away. Your flag he no fly here. We no fools. You want steal our country. My word! You bet! Kalii know too much for that. You clear

Raymond Plays the Game 253

out quick and lively, or Kalii tell oui oui men, and send over to Australia for floating thunders to help him give you jolly good licking. My word! You bet! God save the King!"

"What does the black beggar mean?" cried the amazed commander in German. "Up with the flag and never mind him. We'll risk any trouble, and swear they attacked us treacherously, thus forcing us to annex their island."

"Present arms!" ordered an officer. "Prepare to salute the flag!"

A clatter of arms followed, and the men raised their rifles.

Then the commander got the surprise of his life, as did also those of his men who were observant. Kalii stood smiling beside the commanding officer, his hand was raised to the level of that gentleman's head, and in that hand was a cocked revolver of latest British navy pattern. "If you don't speaky quick and lively and tell your old woman warriors drop their pop pops, Kalii he will send you to place where good Christians go when they die," he said without a tremor in his voice. "You savvy?"

"What, you greasy old cannibal!" roared the infuriated officer, still talking German. "Would you dare to threaten me?"

"Kalii he no savvy what you say," smiled the

native chief sweetly. "Why don't you tell warriors look round?"

Kalii had already seen a little incident which had filled him with an astonishment he could scarcely conceal. A number of his own warriors had appeared without any warning behind the German party, and their actions were significant. They had turned the Germans' own machine gun upon the invaders, and were handling its mechanism with a business-like knowledge of its nature which he had not expected to find among unsophisticated New Scotian islanders. Another party of his warriors, too, had somehow become possessed of rifles which seemed to be of a design anything but obsolete. They were squatted carelessly upon the ground on the right flank of the Germans, and were toying with their weapons in a manner most distracting to the nerves of those in front of them. The rest of the natives were armed with clubs and spears, and apparently only waited the signal to rush upon the Germans. Tapiloa and Manobo were seemingly as much surprised as their chief at the sudden turn of events. They did not know that rifles were so common among their people, and marvelled greatly at their sudden appearance, especially Manobo, because their possessors were of the most humble

rank, and therefore not known personally to him. He hastily concluded that a oui oui man's trading ship had come to grief on the reef surrounding the island—traders are forbidden by the laws of all nations to sell or otherwise supply rifles to the islanders—and regretted exceedingly that he had not been in the ensuing scramble.

“Why you not sticky up flag now?” enquired Kalii. “Kalii he think you should looky round yourself.”

But by this time the Germans had looked round and had realized that the simple natives had scored against them. Not a word broke the silence which followed while the commander took in the position; then he used language which Raymond felt thankful was German, and not supposed to be understood by him.

At this point Schwartz stepped forward. “You’ve bungled things,” he said in his own language to the still threatened commander. “Let me talk to the nigger.” He assumed what he doubtless thought was a reassuring smile, but which really looked more like a snarl, and, turning to Kalii, began explaining in a strange mixture of Mota and South Sea English that a great mistake had been made, and that the visitors were merely paying a friendly call on the great Christian people of

the island. He added some words in German to the commander, and Kalii felt he would like to order his warriors to give the man a thrashing, for the insolence of those words was unbounded. He had too much sense, however, to show that he understood them, and so continued to smile.

But the man was now talking in such an alluring way, promising gifts of the most extravagant nature to everyone, that Kalii began to fear the cupidity of those who heard and understood him might be aroused. He signed to Tapiloa to cover the commander with his revolver, and promptly turned his back upon Schwartz with the words: "You talky talky like parrot. Me no savvy what you say. Me no wanty to talk to you. How you fellows no go away?"

Schwartz almost danced with rage, but he could not help himself, and he got no sympathy from anyone. Kalii entered into conversation with Manobo, who, when it was concluded, shouted out a lengthy order to his warriors which caused them to close in upon the unfortunate Germans. What would have happened within the next few minutes it is not easy to say, for although Kalii had told Manobo that he only wished to frighten the foreigners into a knowledge of their precarious position, Manobo himself was not so scrupulous

about the matter, and Kalii knew that he had altered his order into something more drastic.

But an interruption came from another quarter.

"What in the name of Manchester and Salford is the meaning of this little meeting?" a loud voice cried, and its owner strode up the village from the landward side. "Has the great Kaiser shifted his Reichstag to the South Seas, and has he granted a charter of independence to Kalii's people by telegram?"

"Fat Jack!" ejaculated Tapiloa; but no one paid any attention, and he quickly recollected himself.

"Ah, you are just in time!" cried the commander in English. "You are the man whom my government is going to subsidize on these islands. Please call off these black dogs. Tell them anything you like." Evidently Fat Jack was well known as a free trader who did not care much who owned the islands.

"You just wait until I get the hang of the thing, and maybe I'll understand you," bellowed Fat Jack, pushing his way through the crowd of natives, all of whom greeted him affectionately. They had often received presents from him without giving any mats or copra in exchange.

The German repeated his words, adding many reasons why Jack should take their side.

Jack grunted and nodded his head. "I'll see what I can do for you," he said finally. "You want your little flag to fly here as a token that Germany rules the New Scotias, and that trespassers will be prosecuted?"

"Yes, that is so," the commander agreed. "Bring that about, and on behalf of my government I will promise you a monopoly of the trade."

"That's mighty good of you," responded Jack, "seeing that my chief opposition just now comes from a half-decent German fellow who would give a good fortune to be on the Spree—no, I don't mean that in the English way; but as I was saying, he is not a bad sort of fellow, although he is a German and——"

"Yes, yes, we all know that. You can tell us later," interrupted Schwartz. "Get on with the matter in hand just now."

"You are in a mighty hurry, old saurkraut," Fat Jack retorted. "I don't know that it is any business of mine to pull you out of your trouble; but seeing I am a white man and you happen to be the same, I'll see what I can do for you. But mind you, no monkeying, or I'll proclaim myself Kaiser of the New Scotias."

He walked over to Kalii, who had been listening all the time, and placed his hand upon his

shoulder. "Kalii, my man," he said, "what lingo you savvy best? Fat Jack he no want everyone know what him say to you."

"Oh, me savvy Mota, Oui Oui lingo, Hoch Hoch, or Englis," answered Kalii, wondering which side Fat Jack would take in the dispute, and also speculating in a vague way as to the chances of his having had anything to do with the disappearance of the real Kalii. Tapiloa was thinking over the advantages or disadvantages of disclosing their identity to Fat Jack and sending him for the captain and the *Mota's* men.

"Then I'll talk in the best Mota I've been able to pick up since I staked my claim among you poor, simple-minded, and honest Christians," he said, and this in effect is what he told Kalii:

"Kalii, you bottle-nosed cannibal, you've got the whip hand of these lager-swilling Germans, and don't you forget to use it. They've asked me to try to induce you to allow them to plant their rag of a flag in your village, but as your friend I tell you to see them planted ten miles deep in that place where all bad people go, first. They dare not rush you while I'm here, and in any case, you are stronger than they. Stick to your country like a fly to treacle, and help will be here before long."

"How can I get help?" asked Kalii, wondering

if Jack had seen through his disguise, and was referring to the *Mota's* men.

"It's coming all right, my man," replied the trader. "My old thief—I beg his pardon—Raisuli, or whatever his name is, and I were visiting that ferocious old fellow Tamii, who is in the same line as you, with some samples of a new kind of turkey-red, and cheap diabolo sets, when we sighted the German cruisers coming up the coast. Guessing what it meant, I came on at once, and Tamii got so angry that he stopped eating men and sent round his fiery cross. He is coming, with his warriors and his bagpipes, to help you as fast as he can travel, and I only hope he won't eat you after he finishes the Germans."

Kalii could not answer. He thought the relief would be considerably worse than the present trouble, and while he talked to Tapiloa in low tones, Fat Jack turned to the Germans and said: "It's not a blamed bit of good. Kalii is as stubborn as a Dutchman with cold feet, and his men are getting hungry. My advice to you is to clear out before dinner-time, for I expect they'll have some visitors to dinner to-day, and meat is very scarce hereabouts. Hallo! I hear them now."

CHAPTER X

Rule, Britannia!

BUT Fat Jack was slightly in error; it was not a party coming to the relief of Kalii who were responsible for the great disturbance at the end of the village behind the Germans. For a moment the young deputy chief thought it might be the *Mota's* people, for surely they could have stumbled across the village by this time if nothing serious had happened to them. The idea that the newcomers might be an army raised by the real Kalii and Tapiloa also occurred to him, and the perspiration streamed down his coffee-stained face, and his state of nervous tension reached dangerously near the breakdown point.

"Smith," he gasped, "will the captain and the men never come? Henderson has never been far away as yet when we were in trouble." He saw Manobo standing within hearing distance, so he addressed him, saying in *Mota*: "My faithful Manobo, we have beaten the foreigners so far, but a new danger threatens us. Do you know what it is?"

The Island Traders

"No, my chief," the warrior responded, "but we shall meet it as brave men who do not know fear."

"Then you take command here and see that these people do not move. Tapiloa and I will see what now confronts us. If we can hold out long enough the great chief Tamii will relieve us; he is marching through the forest now with his mighty warriors."

"Blow me for a punctured airship!" ejaculated Fat Jack just then. "It's a blamed shore party of Frenchmen. Come on, Kalii, I'll go with you and see what they want. Both French and German can't have the same island."

A band of French marines broke into the cleared space from the road as he spoke, and came on at the double towards the square wherein were congregated the Germans and the natives. Everyone had now seen them. The German officers uttered words which, although heart-felt, had no place in any German dictionary. But the men behind the machine gun never moved, nor did the warriors who owned the rifles. In silence all but the Germans watched the advancing Frenchmen. There were about fifty of them, and they carried a large flag and were trailing a machine gun behind.

Kalii and Tapiloa walked to meet them, talking rapidly together, and their conversation would

have greatly surprised anyone had it been overheard. Just then the Germans burst into a loud cheer, and, looking round for the reason, Kalii and his companion saw another band of German sailors break from the timber land opposite their comrades and charge wildly across the square.

"It's all up now, Smith," groaned Kalii; "we've put up a good fight, but we're done now. We can't fight Europe."

Tapiloa's reply gave but little encouragement. His spirits had gone. He was playing perhaps the stranger game of the two, because he had to act without knowing what was said, and Manobo's persistency in talking had driven him almost to desperation.

"I won't advise, Ray, old man," he said gloomily. "We've not had the help we might have had from our own people, but I would as soon peg out now as run for it to camp."

"Very well, Smith, we have no hope, but we'll bluff things as long as we can, and perhaps the captain, or Tamii, or a terrific discharge from these volcanoes over there, may come along to finish things. We'll not go back now alive."

"Don't you go and get downhearted, Kalii," put in Fat Jack, coming up behind them. "You take it from me you've still got all those foreigners

in a hole they'll not get out of easily. Put off as much time as you can; Tamii will soon arrive."

"Thanks, Jack!" replied Kalii in his natural voice, forgetting for the moment that Fat Jack was not in their secret.

"Great Manchester!" yelled Jack, laying his hand on Kalii's shoulder and peering into his face. "Well, I'll be frozen! I'll be cannibalized! I'll be eaten by Tamii if you are not that youngster who, with another, collared Vatii! What in creation put you up to this game? And where is the other Kalii? Phew! I see through it all now. Good old Australia is not in the cold after all. I wondered how the drunken reprobate Kalii had suddenly developed such a nerve. Well, I'll be blowed! But where is Captain Murchison?"

The moment he had uttered the simple words, the false Kalii knew he had blundered, and he waited his chance to spring at the big man's throat; but as Jack continued to express himself he saw that he had really found a friend, and he was sorely in need of such. Tapiloa had likewise experienced the emotions of his chief, and had also prepared to hurl his slight weight at the big trader, when the Fat Jack's love of oratory saved him from such an attack.

"Oh, Jack," cried Kalii, "what can we do

now? We have no one to help us. The captain and our men are camped six miles or so north of the village, and don't know of our position here. We were scouting around last night and struck the German party, and saw that the only chance of Australia getting the islands was for us to seize the real Kalii and impersonate him. You know the rest."

"But how about this fellow here? How have you kept him from spotting you?"

"I'm Smith," put in the fellow; and Fat Jack stared at him and gasped.

"You that little photographing, trick-playing, ignorant, no-good compass-boxer?" he cried. "Great Manchester! I'll be thinking I'm the German Emperor next."

"Perhaps you'll do as a good substitute if you hurry up and act," said Smith, alias Tapiloa. "Order these beggars rushing over here to stand still until they've explained their business."

"You can count on me, boys," Jack responded, sending a loud bellow across the square, which somehow the advancing Frenchmen interpreted correctly into a command to halt. They did so, surprised, but nevertheless too wary to rush on a row of machine guns which they supposed must be hidden somewhere to back up the command.

The Island Traders

Jack then repeated the order to the Germans. They did not at first appear to be inclined to give any heed to the command, and Fat Jack hurled forth an additional flood of emphatic eloquence which, if words had power, might have stopped an avalanche.

But the natives left behind showed a keen appreciation of the affair, and much to the surprise of Jack, Kalii, and Tapiloa, the machine gun which had been menacing the first German party was silently and suddenly turned upon the second. The natives with the rifles never altered their position. The three men walked up to the French party. Its members were just beginning to realize the strange position of things, and seemed very anxious that the natives should look upon them as friends. The senior officer, a gentleman whom Kalii and Tapiloa at once remembered having seen at the banquet at Noumea, stepped out to meet them, bowing profusely.

"We have come," he said in English, "to offer you our help. Friends came to us this morning, and they say to us, 'Go up to the village in the mountain if you have not the wish to see the islands of New Scotia under the German flag'. We come, for we have much like for the brave people who live here, and we do not wish them

to become slaves. That is all. We were followed by those people over there. They came from the German cruisers lying outside the reef, but we were here first, and it is France who has the honour. What say you?"

"I say you can have as much honour as you like for all I care, but the chief here doesn't understand English, so I'll have to translate your words to him," replied Fat Jack. "But first tell me—I am only a trader, you know, and though neutral here, a friend of the French people in Noumea—who are your friends who sent for you? Do they live hereabouts? Are they natives, or Chinamen, or your own secret agents?"

"They are the vairy clevaire people of a trade-ship. How they got here I do not know. Captain Murchison is the officeair, and they do not have much like for the Germans."

"I see," said Fat Jack. "Just wait till I explain." He turned to Kalii, and in his best Mota began: "You've heard what the frog-eaters have just said. Of course he is telling the kind of stories poor old George Washington got spanked for, when he says he is here with his gang of island stealers to help anyone. It is their own interests they are looking after. But it is quite clear to me now that Captain Murchison is not so

ignorant of things here as you think, for he has sent down to the Frenchmen to try to run them against the Germans, who were already in the village. The pity is that a second crowd of the Kaiser's men followed them." Jack, as usual, would have continued speaking for a longer period than was necessary, but Kalii interrupted him.

"Then what do you advise?" he asked in Mota.

"I advise the use of that great art which the copybooks used to tell me was the soul of business, or something else. I refer to procrastination."

"Oh!" both boys muttered, for the last word had to be given in English. "Explain, please."

"Jabber something to me and get as angry as you can, and I'll tell them that you are as mad as can be, at any armed party coming into your country without being asked. That will make them sit up a bit, and then I'll talk smoothly to them, and induce them to retire into the woods until I can bring you round to reason, or Tamii comes. We'll then do the same with the Germans, and if they don't set to fighting each other then, I'm a fat-headed Chinese coolie, and the millennium has come!"

"All right, Jack!" said Kalii, and raising his voice he launched out in a wild tirade in Mota, which neither Jack nor anyone else could possibly

have understood. As a matter of fact, Kalii was shouting out a list of all the words in his vocabulary. It was very impressive, and the Frenchmen seemed greatly alarmed. This was not the Kalii their traders and agents had led them to expect they would find.

Kalii finished up with some words spoken more carefully, so that Jack could grasp their purport. "Go ahead now," he said, "and Tapiloa and I will go over and interview the new party of Germans. I see one among them whom I believe to be a gentleman, and I will try to make him put off time."

"Your words are understood, oh most learned and mighty chief!" Fat Jack answered, with a serious face, "but for any sake keep your eye on the high and irresponsible Tapiloa; he is a kid that never thinks, and——"

But the youths had departed. Poor Tapiloa the second had, it seemed, a reputation for thoughtlessness and love of mischief among those who knew him which, in Kalii's opinion, was not deserved. Kalii did not then tell him what Fat Jack had said, and together they walked over to the angry party of Germans, who had not reckoned on being stopped by a tribe of savages and a machine gun.

"What fellow him boss here?" cried Kalii, as

they approached, assuming the air of an indignant chief who wished to show his knowledge of English.

Two men stepped from the ranks, one dressed in a uniform similar to that of the commanding officer of the party surrounded by the natives, and the other in white flannels and a pith helmet. The latter was Herr Branstein. The boys recognized him at once, but no sign of surprise showed itself on their brown faces. They concluded rightly that the cruiser had gone back from Auckland for him and had lifted him from the Union Company's mail steamer, and then come on at full speed.

"This gentleman is in command," Herr Branstein said, bowing politely, "but as I have a better knowledge of languages, he has asked me to speak for him. I presume I have the honour of addressing the great chief Kalii?" His manner was extremely courteous, and his words had a kindly ring in them.

"Um!" grunted Kalii. "What you want with him? Kalii he no want you people here. You better go away quick an' lively. My word! You bet! Kalii's warriors maybe eat you."

Herr Branstein smiled. "I am afraid, friend Kalii, that your warriors would find German sailors

rather difficult to digest. I fear also that we cannot go away until we have come to an understanding. I am sorry to have to inform you that your kingdom is within the sphere of influence controlled by my country, and that it has become necessary to annex it formally."

"Me no savvy what you say."

"Me no savvy neither. My word! You bet! Auld Lang Syne!" added Tapiloa. "Why you no speaky lingo fellow can savvy?"

"Oh, I can do that too," laughed the German. "I have been studying Mota since the question of the mastery of the Pacific first became an international affair." He changed abruptly to Mota and said: "Great and wise chief Kalii, my chief, the great white king beyond the seas, has sent us to you to say that he will pay you much money every year——"

"You mean the great chief whose country is in every sea, and whose floating thunders are everywhere?" interrupted Kalii. "I too am a great chief. I should like to see my brother. You tell the King of Britain that Kalii——"

"I was not referring to the King of Britain. His Imperial Majesty Wilhelm——"

"Um! Me no savvy your Mota. Come back to Englis. What for you tell me hims floating thun-

ders go everywhere, if you not mean the great chief of Britain?" Kalii's indignation was well assumed.

"My chief will pay you one thousand pounds every year, and fight your battles with his floating thunders, and all he asks in exchange is that you will allow a beautiful flag to fly in your village." Herr Branstein still spoke in Mota; he had ignored Kalii's rude remarks.

"Kalii has had many words from great chiefs before. They all talky talky much, but they no talk true. How am Kalii to know you speak truth and all that money will be paid to him?" He spoke in sandalwood, so as to give Tapiloa a hint as to the nature of the conversation.

"I will pay you the first money now," the German said, smiling to find that Kalii was, after all, avaricious.

"Very well," answered Kalii, resuming the South Sea tongue, "Kalii has much to think about. Go away with your warriors until he holds counsel with his people. He will answer you when he hears what they say."

"I am afraid it will make little difference what they say, my friend," Herr Branstein muttered in German, but in Mota he added: "I will take my warriors away until you have held a consultation."

"Why can't we rush the place now?" enquired the German officer in his tongue.

"We should precipitate a war with France, that's all," returned Herr Branstein in the same language. "See, the Frenchmen are retiring also. We'll have to be very careful. I am surprised we have not yet run against that trading ship's people, but I suppose it is they who are responsible for the appearance of our friends the French."

"Why do you say you will go away and still wait here?" demanded Kalii, who understood what they had been saying perfectly well.

"I beg your pardon," Herr Branstein replied, "I had forgotten. Your voice, most mighty chief, reminds me of a young friend whom I expected to meet here, but sincerely trust I will not. But I must ask you to allow the German sailors whom your people surround to come with us. And I hope we shall all be great friends before the sun goes to rest."

He signed to the men, and they turned and marched away, wondering greatly why the wishes of a savage should have been given any consideration.

The Frenchmen had also retired, but the first party of Germans were still virtually prisoners, the

expostulations of the officers being met by a serene smile from Manobo, who did not understand a single word they uttered. And the silent guard of armed natives did not take their rifles from their threatening position for a moment.

Fat Jack, Kalii, and Tapiloa walked into the village square together. "Well, you precious pair of wholesale frauds," was the big man's salutation, "we are winning easily."

"I am glad to hear it," returned Tapiloa. "I was beginning to think I would never hear good old English again."

Kalii said nothing. He was thinking over some of Herr Branstein's words, and wondering if his disguise had been penetrated. They were now among the natives, and were greeted with loud cheers. Somehow the natives thought that the presence of the great trader in their midst was a guarantee of safety, for was not he one of that people on the fringe of their own sea whose floating thunders were greater than all those of the foreigners, and whose friends they were?

"Most trusted and brave Manobo," cried Kalii, "suffer these poor foreigners to join their own people. I have promised, and I wish to have some talk with our great white friend."

"But we shall keep their kill-many-times pop

pop?" said Manobo. "They may come back again."

"No, let them take it with them," cried Fat Jack in Mota; "it will help them to kill each other."

And after a few words with Fat Jack, who posed as their friend, the Germans marched off to join their comrades; but their band did not play.

Then the people cheered their great chief again and again, until at length he ordered silence, and told Manobo to tell them that danger was not yet over, and that their white friend had persuaded the oui oui men and the hoch hoch men to go away for a time, because he expected help from his friends soon, and then they would together drive all the invaders into the sea.

While Manobo delivered this message, and added some of his own thoughts, Fat Jack, Kalii, and Tapiloa walked over to the chief's house and held a long consultation, in which Fat Jack was told of the disappearance of the real Kalii and Tapiloa. This puzzled the bluff trader greatly, and while trying to find a solution of the mystery, a shout from the natives made them look out. Herr Branstein, Schwartz, the French commander, and two others were approaching from the forest, one man bearing a white flag in his hand.

"More trouble ahead," groaned Kalii and Tapi-loa dismally.

"It may be, boys," rejoined Jack, "but it may not be for us. All the same, I have been listening for the sound of their machine guns in action this last little while, and I can only fancy now that I am about the most fat-headed cuss ever made, and that both parties have come to some agreement. We had better go out and meet them before they come up to the warriors. I heard a noise a while ago which makes me think there is a big surprise coming along for somebody."

They went out to meet the advancing party, and Herr Branstein enquired of Fat Jack abruptly as they met: "What part are you taking in this affair?"

"That of friendly adviser. I know the natives well, and should not like to see any harm come to them," replied Jack.

"Then you had better advise them to offer no opposition," said the German. "Will you interpret for us? I can make my meaning clearer in English."

"I don't mind, so long as you don't ask me to say words that my old Sunday-school teacher wouldn't like."

"Does it matter to you who owns these islands?"

“Not the shake of a dead dog’s tail. I’ve got the trade already, and both French and Germans have promised to subsidize me.”

“Which promise I repeat now if you will do your best to prevent bloodshed.”

“And which on behalf of the French government I also repeat,” put in the French officer.

“You people seem to have got mighty fond of each other pretty suddenly,” Fat Jack observed irrelevantly.

“Yes,” said Herr Branstein; “rather than waste our strength fighting over these islands, as doubtless Britain intended us to do when she withdrew from the conference, we have agreed to divide them between us, France getting the southern islands over which Vatii rules, and Germany taking the northern ones which are under Kalii.”

“But you have left out Tamii, the greatest chief of all. He bosses the whole group, although his home is on the south end of this, the largest island. He will have something to say in this arrangement.”

“He will not get the opportunity. We are going to annex this island to the German Empire now, and you must advise your friend Kalii that opposition on his part will only mean bloodshed, while, if he accepts what is inevitable, he will be well looked after, and will receive a pension.”

"Have you got Vatii in the same sort of hole?" Fat Jack asked the Frenchman. Kalii and Tapiloa were furious, but they knew that their companion was working with some object in view, and they could not afford to show that they understood the nature of the conversation.

"Oh, we'll soon get him, once we have no opposition to fear!" the Frenchman answered. "His headquarters are on the island on which you have your trading station, I believe."

"Yes," admitted Jack. "But don't you think it is playing pretty low down for white men to go about the Pacific stealing islands? Will you not have to answer for it to the other European Powers?"

"No," Herr Branstein replied. "Australia is the only country that has any right to interfere, and apparently she has left the New Scotias to their fate, the same as Britain has done. I don't think it is noble at all, the annexing of countries whose peoples can't object; but the mastery of the Pacific is a question that must be settled without consideration of the natives, and after all they will be better off under civilizing influences."

"Oh, it's none of my business! I suppose you are simply coming over here to hoist your flag, and shoot down those who oppose you?"

"I fear that is so. We must assume what one of your country's poets has called the white man's burden."

"And you are sure Australia hasn't got the move on you?"

"Quite; our boats guard the gap, and if she sends ships along now she will have to fight. Possession, as you know, is the only fact which counts in a scramble."

"I see. How many men have you between you?"

"About a hundred and fifty. But you are wasting time. See! they are coming now. Advise your friends to retire and not interfere."

An army of men with bayonets fixed advanced from the wood as he spoke.

"Now, do you know I am a peace-loving man myself, and I come from Manchester, and I probably know more about these islands than you, and I would advise you, as a friend, to clear out of here at the fastest rate you can run. A hundred and fifty men will not be more than a mouthful to that Tamii whom you despise, and his men. By the Southern Cross! They are round about you now."

"What do you mean?" cried the Frenchman.

"We will turn our machine guns upon any mob."

"You had better get back among your own

people and get ready, then," Jack said, "for here they come."

At that moment a series of wild, unearthly sounds, not unlike those which might be caused by an army of Highland pipers all tuning their instruments at the same time, burst out over in the forest, and simultaneously a horde of stalwart savages broke into the clearing and charged headlong upon the European forces. It was a sight never to be forgotten. The warriors were naked, except for a fibrous kilt strapped round each man's body. They were all armed with rifles or bows and arrows, and among them were a great number of splendid specimens of savage manhood blowing lustily at what looked like Scotch bagpipes. At their head was a man well over six feet in height, and the plumed adornment which graced his head proclaimed him to be the greatly dreaded chief Tamii.

A loud command was heard arising from the ranks of the combined armies, and quickly they formed into a square bristling with steel, the machine guns rattling into position as if by magic influence. But they were not used. Swift as the shadow of a cloud moving across the land, the savages rushed upon them, and high above their frenzied shrieks swelled the discordant, yet exulting and soul-firing notes of the strange bagpipes.

The machine guns were smothered in a wave of humanity much as a rock is covered by a huge shoreward rushing breaker, and the little square was borne back into the woods as easily as if it had been composed of helpless puppets instead of picked men from the German and French fleets. Rifles spoke out, and revolvers barked spitefully, but with no apparent effect. Nothing could stop that mad rush of Tamii's kilted warriors.

At the first sight of their allies, Manobo and his men had broken from the village square and charged at the unfortunate marines almost as recklessly as Tamii's men. And the peaceful sunlit clearing had changed in one moment to a scene which made Kalii sick.

Herr Branstein and his companions stood as if hypnotized, staring blankly at the spot where their men had been, and where now lay only machine guns, discarded rifles, articles of clothing, and one or two wounded men.

"Run!" shouted Fat Jack. "Nothing can save you. Cut through the forest and you'll hit the road a mile down. Your men can never rally, and Tamii will eat all he catches."

The Germans and Frenchmen looked at Jack in a noncomprehending manner, but Schwartz, the man whose hairbreadth escapes would fill volumes,

quickly realized the changed position of things. "Yes," he cried, "save yourselves, men; we have lost for the time, but I'll make sure of the chief." He sprang upon Kalii as he spoke, but staggered back instantly with a broken wrist. Tapiloa's revolver was a good weapon, and its owner was a good shot.

"We can win yet," shouted one of the Germans. "Seize the two natives, and we can make terms." He and another rushed upon Kalii and Tapiloa, but Fat Jack hurled one back upon the ground, and a native rushing up from behind caught the other and flung him heavily against the French commander. And now Kalii was prepared to defend himself.

"Go," he cried imperiously in English. "Your lives depend upon the swiftness of your feet. Kalii he despises you."

"Yes, go, you blundering idiots," roared Fat Jack, "or you'll know what a cannibal feast is. Blow you for sausage-headed clothes-props! GO!" He seized Herr Branstein by the collar of his coat and proceeded to run him towards the forest, and suddenly, and without a word, the others sprang to their feet and ran also.

The village was empty except for the women and children, and the sound of Tamii's bagpipes was

fast growing indistinct in the distance. Uttering some words which made Kalii and Tapiloa look after him in much surprise, the native who had treated the German and the French commander so summarily now left the party, and ran swiftly towards the chief's house.

"What in thunder is he after?" cried Fat Jack. "Blow him! I wanted to send him out for your fellows to come and take possession of the village." He paused; the native had climbed to the gabled roof of Kalii's house and out upon the carved embellishments. Next moment he pulled something from under his one garment, and even as the three looked, a Union Jack fluttered on the end of the house.

"Great Manchester!" yelled Fat Jack, and Kalii and Tapiloa also gave vent to an exclamation. But the native was now running along the roof to the other end of the house, and while the onlookers watched, the flag of the Australian Commonwealth opened out on the breeze on the highest point. The chief's house was now under the protection of two flags: one the emblem of freedom and justice the world over, and the other that of the young nation whose glorious destiny it is to rule the great south. If Australia, with Great Britain behind her, could not protect Kalii's people against

any other invasion, then no power on earth could.

The native slid down the roof and dropped lightly to the ground, then, running up to Kalii, he cried excitedly in English: "It's done at last, and to you two boys belongs all the credit. Oh, Raymond, you don't know yet what you've done! You've turned our forlorn hope into a success of which we did not dare to dream. And, Smith, I'll never kick you about again." He caught Kalii by the hand and wrung it fervently, and then did the same with Tapiloa's.

"It's Henderson!" cried Smith. "My, what a fine nigger you make! Where are the others? We've been looking for you all day."

"Have you the right to do that, young man?" put in Fat Jack, nodding his head towards the flags.

"I have. I am an officer in the King's navy. Here is my commission. I joined the Mota on special service."

"Never mind showing your papers. I only asked so that we could arrange the matter some other way if you didn't happen to be qualified. This boy has played too daring a game to allow it to be spoiled now."

"No, no," cried Kalii, "we did nothing, at

least we only did what seemed to be the best possible thing to do. But where is the captain, sir, and all the men? We are not finished yet, because the real Kalii and his chief adviser escaped from us and——”

“And are on board the *Mota*, my boy. Did you actually think we had left you to play this out yourself?”

“But how did you know? And when did you come?”

“Why, Raymond, nearly every man we sent out last night got into this village. Two of them spotted you and Smith, and when they saw you tackle Kalii, and afterwards his satellite, they, thinking to relieve you of the trouble of watching them, carried them back to camp. That camp was not long in growing a black skin, I may tell you, and just at daylight we got here, messengers meanwhile having been sent down to the French.”

“Then it was the *Mota's* men who manned the machine gun, and who covered the Germans with the rifles?”

“It was. Melville himself handled the gun, and Hordern bossed the others. The captain and I kept our eyes on you all the time, and watched for the first chance to hoist these flags. Oh, Raymond, you may feel proud of yourself! The world

at large will never know of this, but those high in authority in Australia and Britain will thank you, and the poor old captain will never forget you, nor shall I, nor any of the *Mota's* men."

"Well, the trick is done, anyhow," said Fat Jack. "And neither France nor Germany can make another move in face of these flags, and to the fact that British cruisers will now back them up. But get ready for trouble, boys; here comes the great Tamii himself and a band of his warriors. I suppose he has left the pursuit to my brigand fellow Raisuli. Smooth him down, Kalii, for Tamii is a terror, and he may want to fight you for the chieftainship of the entire group of islands."

"He'll have to fight me, then," said Henderson grimly. "But I see some of our boys returning too. I know them by their rifles."

Tamii approached the house. He carried a set of bagpipes under his arm. He was an extremely tall man, with a face not quite so brown as Kalii's, and his hair was not adorned in the usual manner. His entire dress consisted of a kilt-like garment made from what at one time was a red blanket. Strangely enough, his face gave one the impression that he was good-natured, and it certainly was that of an intelligent man. He glanced at the flags and

appeared to smile, then he walked up to the group on the veranda, his warriors keeping a respectful distance behind. He glared at Kalii, and spoke some words in a strange language.

“Most mighty chief, I thank you——” began Kalii in Mota, but Tamii stopped him with a growl. Numbers of the natives were now gathering round, having apparently left the pursuit of the foreigners to their fleeter brethren.

“Kalii he no want to fight you——” Fat Jack began, but again Tamii growled. Evidently the dreaded cannibal chief was in a bad humour.

He raised his pipes and placed the chanter in his mouth, and assumed a most ferocious aspect of countenance. A long, shrill, blood-curdling wail resulted, and all the natives near trembled with terror. Well they knew the magic in Tamii’s strange noise machine, and how Tamii’s warriors were invincible when they fought under the influence of these weapons.

Kalii did not know what to do. Tamii looked hungry enough to eat a dozen men. A native pushed through the crowd below, and, vaulting upon the veranda, rushed up to Kalii and caught him in his arms.

“Raymond,” he cried with much emotion, “you’ve saved my life, won these islands for your country,

and given me the means of making my old mother comfortable for ever."

"Why, Captain, is it you? This is Smith; it was his idea, and we both did our best. We are sorry we left camp without telling you, but we thought you wouldn't let us go."

"My lad, never again will I treat youth as incapable of reasoning for itself. I had meant you to act the part of Kalii from the first, but never did I dream that you would have the nerve and courage to dare the combined French and German——"

"Here, old man," interrupted Fat Jack, "if I were to make a speech as long as that you'd be telling me I was a phonograph. Can't you see you are drowning the great Tamii's music?"

"What! Is that Tamii?"

Tamii laid down his pipes slowly and deliberately, and a cry of terror went up from the genuine natives. Tamii spoke.

"Ay, it's Tamii," he said, "ye painted play-actor. Is your memory so short that ye dinna mind me? I'm no vera bonnie, I'll admit, but——"

"Mac!" yelled the captain, springing forward and seizing the notorious chief's grimy hand. "Am I dreaming, or do I really behold you?"

“An’ wha dae ye think I could be if I werena myself, ye misguided, sinfu’ being. Dae ye ken that when a country is annexed it is usual to play a bit tune roond the flag? And I was just trying to warble oot ‘God Save the King’ on ma pipes when ye stopped me.” He grinned, and squeezed the captain’s hand in a grip like the snap of a crocodile’s jaws.

“But I saw you flung from the cave into the pool!” muttered the captain feebly.

“That was the other Tamii, an’ as I hadna the heart to leave the puir ignorant and innocent folk without a chief, I had to tak’ his job on myself. I was in ma lookout tower the nicht before last, when I saw a boat come through the reef at a place where there wasna supposed to be enough water to float a matchbox, and I kent brawly that naebody would risk taking a steamer through but my auld mad friend, Captain Murchison. I had kent for some time that the Germans and French had designs on the New Scotias, so when I saw their boats lying at the big gap on the other side o’ the island, I thocht you would be none the waur o’ my interference, and I brocht my Highland warriors doon as soon as I could gather them in. But I’m tired o’ being a cannibal king, so I’ll gang back wi’ ye to Sydney, an’ wi’ ma friend Kalii an’ me

askin' for Australian protection, Australia shouldna hae much troubling o' conscience at annexing the islands. I hereby appoint my vera good freend Fat Jack o' Manchester chief o' my cannibals until he gets tired o' the job. Hae ye onything for eatin', Kalii?"

It was some time before anyone recovered from their surprise sufficiently to be able to speak, but when they did begin—Hordern and Melville and nearly all the *Mota's* men were now within hearing distance—tongues rattled to such an extent that the real natives present thought Tamii's strange warriors, or those who were making such a noise, were parrots. Fat Jack's words were of an exclamatory nature, and may not be repeated, but he concluded by saying: "All right, Tamii, or Mac! I'll be King of the Cannibal Islands, with Manobo, Raisuli, and your kilted and bagpipe-playing warriors to support me. We'll keep those flags flying until the British cruisers arrive, and then I'm going to learn to play the bagpipes, and grow rubber on these islands in peaceful contentment. Come along and hunt up dinner now. You have plenty of time to get away before the crowd comes back, for if my Raisuli is in command of the warriors, he'll not stop until he drives the foreigners into the sea."

“Ay, that brigand-like fellow o’ yours is a guid man in a scrape,” agreed Tamii. “He’s maist sensible, and gets on weel wi’ my breeless warriors. He doesna like Frenchmen, though, and I dinna think he kens the difference between them and Germans. I put him in command so as to be sure none o’ them would come back.”

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It was night. The *Mota* had safely negotiated the hidden reef gap, and, with flames belching from her red-hot funnel, was leaping through the sea like a thing endowed with fiendish life.

“Yes, Mac,” Captain Murchison was saying, as he and his old comrade smoked cigars on the poop deck, and gazed back at the twin burning mountains, under one of which nestled Kalii’s village, soon to become the home of a prosperous rubber-growing community under British rule, “it hardly seems credible, but the facts remain as I have told you. These two youngsters you see forward there cheeking the chief engineer kept the place alone against all comers. Raymond does not know it, but his uncle is the head of the firm who took the job on hand from the government. That firm is greatly interested in the future of the islands. I was asked to take the youth with me to see what sort of stuff was in him, and I’ll go my

share of the money we've earned that the world will yet ring with his name."

"I believe that. He is a lad o' parts, and when I get tired o' civilized life again I am going to ask him to come awa' wi' me on that daft trip I telt ye about before. But just wait an' I'll gie ye a bit cheery tune on ma pipes."

There was no objection. All but the watch had fallen asleep, and not even the fearful music of the great Tamii's pipes could wake them.

